

Grace

Walk Around Grace

You may already know this but serving as a cross cultural missionary is messy.

Our family served in remote Ethiopia. We hired believers from a neighboring tribe to work as teachers and agriculture workers while also church planting. We were a tight knit group until they went on strike in support of a regional labor dispute. Everything stopped, including all evangelism. When I couldn't meet their demands, I was accused of being a slave master which resulted in a warrant for arrest and a court date that would result in my deportation. I was crushed. The fledgling church would die. Just before my court date, I received a call. The ring-leader's mother died on a bus headed to the hospital. He was stranded on the side of the road with her body two hours away. Would I come and pick them up?

What would you do?

It's hard when people hurt you. It's gut wrenching when someone you love hurts you. So how do you handle situations like that? We can talk about grace and debate grace and even develop theological stances on grace but when it gets down to it, how do you walk around with grace?

In Acts 8:9-25, we read about a man named Simon who was such an amazing magician that people said he was from God. Through the preaching of Philip, many people believed, including Simon who then followed Philip, amazed at his teachings and the signs that he saw. Peter and John were sent to lay hands on these new believers so they could receive the Holy Spirit. When Simon the magician saw this, he was even further amazed and asked how much it would cost? Peter was appalled.

Acts 8:20-23 *Peter answered: "May your money perish with you, because you thought you could buy the gift of God with money! You have no part or share in this ministry, because your heart is not right before God. Repent of this wickedness and pray to the Lord in the hope that he may forgive you for having such a thought in your heart. For I see that you are full of bitterness and captive to sin."*

Did Simon misunderstand and was he asking an inappropriate question? Absolutely. Could Peter have responded with grace? Yes. Peter felt justified in his response towards a sinful attitude but could a bit of grace have changed the outcome? Probably.

Simon walked away dejected and still without proper understanding. Church history claims that Simon didn't turn from faith though. He continued on in his misguided faith and is credited with starting Gnosticism. He went away proclaiming his secret, hidden knowledge, mystic understanding of Jesus and one of the greatest heresies was born. If Peter had only shown a bit of grace, maybe things would have been different. Thankfully, Jesus shows us a much better example.

In Luke 7:36-50, Jesus is eating at the home of a Pharisee when a woman of ill repute enters and weeping over his feet, wiping them with her hair and anointing him with perfume. The

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Pharisee was insulted because if Jesus knew what she had done then He would not allow this. Her presence and touch were defiling! She would cause great harm to the reputation of Jesus. Jesus replies by telling the parable of the two debtors. Then Jesus shows grace.

Luke 7:44-48 *Then he turned toward the woman and said to Simon, “Do you see this woman? I came into your house. You did not give me any water for my feet, but she wet my feet with her tears and wiped them with her hair. You did not give me a kiss, but this woman, from the time I entered, has not stopped kissing my feet. You did not put oil on my head, but she has poured perfume on my feet. Therefore, I tell you, her many sins have been forgiven—as her great love has shown. But whoever has been forgiven little loves little.” Then Jesus said to her, “Your sins are forgiven.”*

Did Jesus point out all her flaws and sins? No. Did Jesus back away repulsed, concerned about His own reputation? No. Jesus showed grace. The Pharisee had written her off. Like Peter, the Pharisee saw sin and there was no grace, only justice. But Jesus is more. Jesus is just and He is gracious. If only we could look past the hurt people cause us; if only we could look past their sin and show grace like Jesus.

In case you were wondering, I drove two hours and helped him lift his dead mother into my Land Cruiser. We drove in silence back to his home where mourners were waiting. Once she was unloaded, I drove off. Two years before I was one of the mourners at his father’s funeral and we cried together. This time, I drove off and cried alone. Sometimes grace is messy too.

- **Has there ever been a time where your lack of godly grace has made a situation worse?**
- **Are you currently in a situation that could use more godly grace and what are some ways that you can reflect Christ more instead of your own emotions?**
- **How can we avoid being taken advantage of while still showing God’s grace?**
- **What is your role in helping others show grace?**



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