

Shine Through Graciousness

Stuck in the Middle

June 5, 2016

PRELUDE – My Lighthouse

**Worship songs – My Lighthouse / Come
Ye Sinners**

Communion reflection – Rick

The Apostle Paul writes that ...

The Lord Jesus, on the night he was betrayed, took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and said, “This is my body, which is for you; do this in remembrance of me.”

In the same way, after supper he took the cup, saying, “This cup is the new covenant in my blood; do this, whenever you

*drink it, in remembrance of
me.” 1 Corinthians 11:23-25
(NIV)*

In the next few minutes, that’s what we want to do. We want to remember the sacrifice that Jesus made for us on the cross as we share in communion together.

Now, whenever we do this, there are always some who think “well, Rick, I’d really like to participate but I’ve been pretty sinful lately. I just don’t feel worthy of receiving communion today.”

And I always say “that’s OK. I understand how you feel. But you should take it anyway because Jesus said ‘I have not come to call the righteous. I have not come for the people who think they are worthy.’” Jesus came, as the song said, for “sinners

poor and needy”; *people who know they are not righteous*; people who know they have fallen short of the perfection for which God intended them.

And communion is a reminder of that; a reminder that forgiveness and salvation is not the result of anything we do or don't do. It's about what Jesus did. It's totally *grace*. In sending Jesus to atone for our sin, God treats us far better than we deserve. He offers us far more than we have earned.

So, during this next song, I invite you to get up from your seat and go to one of the communion tables, take a piece of bread, dip it in the juice, eat it and then go back to your seat. And be thankful that acceptance and forgiveness is not about how good we are but about how good *Jesus* is. Be thankful

that God is a God of grace.

**Feature – “Behold the Lamb”
@communion stations**

<Mark prayer>

God, you bestow goodness and honor upon us though we sin and fall short of your glory. You bless us with salvation through Christ though we do not deserve it. For that reason (and many others) we now, as a congregation, bestow honor and goodness upon You. We bless You for You are deserving of our worship and our praise. Amen.

Let's stand together and do just that. Let's bless the Lord.

Worship song – 10,000 Reasons

Announcements – video

As Shannon said, today we are continuing in our series “SHINE through Graciousness” ... which is actually the second of *five* series looking at how individual Christians and churches can be effective in fulfilling Jesus’ commission to be shining lights in the darkness of this world; shining lights that would bring honor and glory to God in such a way that others would see that light and be drawn to Him.

And the reason we’re doing these five series right now is because *right now* (at least in this country) there is an unprecedented level of disillusionment and even disgust with the establishment and the system. People are looking for a better way which is part of the reason why Donald

Trump and Bernie Sanders have the surprising –maybe even shocking – level of support they do. And who knows? Those guys, if they came into power, might actually accomplish something good.

But what we do know for sure is that the ultimate hope of humanity is not in political or economic systems run by fallen human beings. It never has been and never will be. Hope for transformation always begins in the hearts and minds of individual men and women because when individuals change, families and communities change. And when families and communities change, cities and states and nations change. And when that happens, the world changes.

And the only thing that has the power to

truly change a human heart is the grace of God as revealed in the Gospel; the good news that we are so loved by God that he would send his only Son in the person of Jesus of Nazareth to save us and redeem us from the curse of sin so that a little bit of “up there” (Heaven) can actually begin to come “down here.” Thy Kingdom come Thy will be done on earth – down here – as it is up there (or wherever Heaven is).

But most people are skeptics. They have to see something in order to believe it. And they will not believe in *the love and grace of Jesus* unless and until they see *the life of Jesus* lived out through the people who know Him and have been redeemed by Him – individual Christians and little communities of Christians all over the world called “churches”; you and me and

all of us together.

So, the question we're trying to answer in these five series is "how do we do that?"

Shine Generosity Project Update

Now, if you've been here or watched online over the past month or so, you know that a couple of weeks ago we completed the first of the five series – "SHINE through Generosity." And we started with that quality because true generosity is so rare in this world in spite of that fact that almost everyone is really good at random acts of giving. You remember that a random act of giving is where we hear about a need, we have a little bit of money floating around in our pocket or bank account and then we give.

And that's a good thing – we should do that whenever we can – but *true* generosity; a life *ordered* around being generous, we discovered, goes beyond that.

True generosity (at least, as Jesus talked about it) is the premeditated, calculated, designated emancipation of personal financial assets.

The primary strategy for a person who is truly generous is not to give randomly on the spur of the moment if they happen to have enough money left over. Instead, because they want to set some of their money free (that's emancipation) to help the people and causes that matter to God on a regular basis ...

- They have a plan of when they are

going to give (it's premeditated)

- They've determined the specific percentage or amount ahead of time (it's calculated)
- And they've already decided where it's going (it's designated)

Now, if you were here for the conclusion of that series or if you are on our mailing list you also know that, as a practical application of that series, we kicked off what we're calling *The Shine Generosity Project*.

The goal of the project, we said, is for 30 individuals or families who call NHCC "home" who are not currently giving or who give randomly to set up online recurring donations through our app or website by August 1st. As of Friday we were already 20% of the way towards our goal ... which I think is great!

Now, just to be clear – and I think it’s important that I say this because I may have given the wrong impression – the reason we phrased the goal in terms of setting up online recurring donations is that it’s probably the most practical way – the most efficient and effective way – to be premeditated, calculated and designated in your giving.

But, just to be clear, this isn’t the *only way*. You can still write a check or put cash into the offering. The important thing – however you do it – *is that you have a plan and that you remember to do it regularly and to do it first*. If you pay your bills by check at the first of the month, write that check, too, and make sure it somehow gets here (or wherever you have decided to be

generous). I just want this to be clear: *you don't have to set up an online recurring donation.* But it's probably the most practical way to make sure you do actually do it.

In fact, for many years, that's how Jetta and I have done our giving, although not this year. This year, we're donating appreciated stock to the church so we can maximize contributions to our retirement accounts. But that comes up on my financial to-do list every 15th of the month. And then I go over to Scottrade and I give them the piece of paper that initiates the transfer to NHCC. Some of you might consider doing the same kind of thing because there are some tax advantages to donating investments.

Now, I realize that when I say that some of

you think, “Rick, you’re talking about donating investments. I can’t even imagine doing something like that because my finances are such a mess. I mean, I totally get what you’re saying about generosity and really wish I could do it, but that there just isn’t any way.”

Two thoughts that I hope will help and encourage you.

1. *You can always start somewhere.* Even if your premeditated, calculated and designated plan is to give \$5 a week, that will make a difference because even that amount – as small as you might think it is – *will* affect how you think about money. The idea that “just because it *comes* to me means it *is* for me” will become less and less a part of

your mindset. And then as things *improve* you will increase what you give ... which leads to my second thought:

2. We have people here at NHCC who are trained to *help things improve in your financial life*. We have a free, no-strings-attached ministry called Good Sense that will help you learn how to better manage your income and expenses.

I'll say more about that at the end of the service but, again, the reason this is important; the reason we have this goal; the reason I want you to become generous is that it's so critical both to your individual growth in Christ and to the resourcing of what we can do together as a church. And

that's part of what makes us shine in this world.

- We look at money differently.
- We handle money differently.
- Generosity to us means more than random acts of giving (as good as those are).

It's the premeditated, calculated, designated emancipation of our personal financial assets big or small.

By the way, if you're new here or you missed the generosity series you can watch, listen to or read the messages on our app or website.

Now, I should also add (just in case you're wondering) that we're actually going to

have a project with all five of these series. So, when this current series ends, we'll be announcing the *Shine Graciousness Project* and inviting everyone to make a commitment to that as well.

I just want you to know we're not going to be talking about money and giving for the next five months. We'll also be getting very practical about the other ways we can shine for Christ ... which, at long last, brings me to the topic for this series ... *graciousness*.

Towards a Definition

And let's begin by looking at what graciousness is and, then, why it is one of those "light-shining-in-the-darkness" winsome attitudes and behaviors that stand out in this culture.

Now, the most obvious and simplest definition of the word would be “the quality of being gracious.” Graciousness is the quality of being gracious. Of course, that word itself – *gracious* – has a lot of different meanings.

- For instance, you might say that someone is a *gracious host* which means that they are charming and kind.
- Or you might say that someone was *gracious in defeat* meaning that they were a good sport in how they reacted to their loss.
- Or someone has a *graciously-appointed* home meaning that it’s very comfortable and pleasant.
- Or a *gracious helping* of food means that

there's an abundance of quantity.

Sometimes graciousness is associated with *being graceful*. Saying that someone is a graceful dancer means that they move with smoothness and elegance.

But none of those definitions are what I mean when I talk about graciousness.

When I talk about graciousness what I mean is the predisposition to treat others with the same kind of grace we ourselves have received and continue to receive from God.

What I'm envisioning is a picture where God's grace continues to fill our lives and it just naturally overflows onto others. <diagram>

And that's important to understand because, as Ladell taught us last week, you

can't give to someone else what you haven't already received yourself. I mean, I can't write you a check for \$50 unless I have somehow received \$50 and put it in my checking account. (Well, I *can*, but it'll be worthless).

Now, obviously, if we're going to be gracious people; if we're going to be characterized by graciousness – at least, in the way I'm going to talk about it in this series, then we need to understand what God's grace is. And Ladell did a great job of defining that for us last week. (As always, if you were not here or watching online, you can check it out through our app or our website).

God's grace, he said, is "God doing for us what we do not deserve and cannot do for ourselves – with no strings attached."

And we've already experienced a great illustration of that definition in this service when we did communion. Communion reminded us that Jesus has atoned for our sins even though we are not worthy or deserving of it. That's grace.

Furthermore, the Bible says that before we trust Jesus as our savior, we're spiritually dead in sin which means *can't* do anything to make ourselves righteous. But when we do trust Christ, God does what we can't and makes us spiritually alive just like He raised Jesus from the dead. And from then on he sees us as completely righteous. That, too, is grace.

Furthermore, the Bible says that beyond forgiveness and new life, when we believe God gives us his Spirit to empower us to actually *do* His will and live the kind of life He intends for us. And that, too, is grace because we cannot live that kind of life in our own strength.

God's grace is God doing for us what we do not deserve and cannot do for ourselves.

And in all of this, there are no strings attached. God never says to us ...

- “Clean up your act first and I’ll save you.”
- “Promise in advance to do your best to never sin again and I’ll forgive you.”
- “Live a perfect life from now on – do

exactly as I say – and you’ll not lose your salvation.”

All God asks is that we repent – that we change our minds about Him – and believe (and keep on believing) that Jesus is who He says he is: God in the flesh, the Risen One, the Way, the Truth and the Life.

That’s what we mean by God’s grace. He does for us what we do not deserve and cannot do for ourselves – with no strings attached.

Therefore, if graciousness is *the predisposition to treat others with the same kind of grace we ourselves have received and continue to receive from God* then it means

that our basic orientation towards others will be to do for them what they do not deserve and cannot do for themselves – with no strings attached. That will be our goal. That will be our desire.

And, obviously, that predisposition and orientation can play itself out in a lot of ways.

- Helping people do things that are too hard for them without making them feel stupid or inadequate.
- Random acts of giving where you cover someone's expenses without expecting repayment.
- Doing someone else's work or chores because they're overwhelmed and can't get to it, without expecting they'll make it "even" by doing yours.

- Being nice to family and friends and even strangers when they're having a bad day and aren't being nice to you.

All of those are forms of graciousness. And all of those are really good things and we should do those kinds of things and more whenever we have the chance.

But, for purposes of this series, I want to narrow the focus a bit.

Narrowing the Focus

And I want to do that, again, because of the way things are in our culture right now.

See, in our culture right now, people really do value being nice or, at least, trying to be. People value being helpful to others in

need or, at least, trying to be. That's why there are ice-bucket challenges and Go-Fund-Me pages. That's why people volunteer to help when communities are devastated by natural disasters.

And all of that is really good – and we should do those kinds of things – but, really, there's nothing unique about that kind of graciousness. It's culturally accepted and even expected.

That was true even in Jesus' day and in his culture.

The Gospel of Matthew tells us that he once said to his disciples (and this is from The Message translation).

*“If all you do is love the lovable,
do you expect a bonus?
Anybody can do that. If you*

simply say hello to those who greet you, do you expect a medal? Any run-of-the-mill sinner does that.” Matthew 5:46-47 (MSG)

There’s nothing exceptional about that kind of behavior, Jesus is saying. That’s what everyone does naturally. What everyone does naturally is to love the people they consider lovable and show kindness to people they like.

By the way, the flipside of that is true as well. What everyone also does naturally is to hate the people they consider to be hate-worthy and treat with contempt the people they don’t like.

That was true even in Jesus’ day and in his culture.

“You have heard the law that says, ‘Love your neighbor and hate your enemy.’”

Matthew 5:43 (NLT)

And we’re seeing so much of that these days, aren’t we?

You can’t turn on a news channel – left-leaning or right-leaning – without hearing, on the one hand, so much fawning, bloviating and positive spin from Hillary’s supporters and Bernie’s supporters and Donald’s supporters and, on the other, so much hatred and contempt being flung back and forth between those supporters as well as the candidates themselves.

You can’t get on Facebook or Twitter or read the comments section of the K.C Star without seeing people who don’t even

know each other (and sometimes people who do) committing verbal assault and battery over political and ethical issues.

We live in a world where being loving and kind to *our side, our people, us ...* while being hateful and contemptuous towards *their side or those people or them ...* is the norm. Graciousness, as we think of it and practice it in this culture, is reserved mostly for people who have, in some way, *earned* it from us by being lovable and likeable. They're *deserving*, so if they have a need we'll be glad to help out in any way we can, without expecting anything in return.

And because of that dynamic and the non-stop 24/7 ability to communicate our thoughts and feelings, the fracturing and animosity in our culture is increasing

exponentially. And quite honestly, sometimes I find myself getting sucked into all of that. And I see a lot of other Christians being drawn into it as well.

“Love your neighbor – the people who are like you and who like you – and hate *them* – the people who are not like you and who do not like you. That’s the law most everyone lives by,” Jesus said.

“But, if you really want to be different; if you really want to be unique; if you really want to turn some heads ...

Jesus said ...

“Love your enemies! Pray for those who persecute you!”
Matthew 5:44 (NLT)

“Try loving the people who are *not* lovable. Try being kind to people who are rude and mean and treat you unjustly. Try asking God to pour out as much blessing on them as much He does you. *That* would be exceptional.”

And this is why, as I thought about the characteristics that make followers of Jesus stand out (in a good and winsome way), I decided we should talk about graciousness. But not as we typically think of it – as being loving and kind to *our side, our people, us* when they need a hand up.

Rather, I want us to talk about graciousness as the predisposition to treat *their side, those people, them* with the same kind of grace we ourselves have received and continue to

receive from God. When we do *that*, Jesus said, an amazing thing happens.

He said ...

“In that way, you will be acting as true children of your Father in heaven.”

In other words, “when people look at you and see and experience your predisposition to treat people who you don’t like and who don’t like you with grace, they’ll get a glimpse of how the Kingdom of Heaven works. You’ll be shining the light on God himself ...

... On the God whose graciousness is wildly indiscriminate because ...

“He gives his sunlight to both the evil and the good, and he

*sends rain on the just and the
unjust alike.”* *Matthew*
5:45 (NLT)

You’ll be reflecting the graciousness of a God who sends his Son to give his life for the powerless and the ungodly; for people who not only *can’t* save themselves but who *don’t* even deserve to be saved.

“That’s the God you’ll be revealing to the world,” Jesus said, “when you flip the script and predispose yourself to be gracious to people you don’t like and people who don’t like you.”

So, with that in mind – because it is so countercultural – I want to narrow down the definition of graciousness to focus

specifically on “them.”

Graciousness (as we’re going to talk about it over the next four weeks of this series) is the unconditional predisposition to treat “them” better than they deserve because that’s how God treats me.

Now, let’s break that down a bit.

- By *them* ... I mean people I don’t like and who don’t like me as well as people I disagree with and who are disagreeable to me; people who challenge my beliefs and who are challenging to my beliefs; people who I irritate and who are irritating to me.

By the way, *them* isn’t limited to *classes of people* (like, if you’re a liberal, conservatives are *them*). *Them* can be a

friend or family member who is temporarily unlikeable or disagreeable or challenging or irritating: they're just acting like a jerk for some reason. Or they're unlikeable, disagreeable, challenging or irritating on a specific issue: for example, you don't see eye to eye on religion or ethics or politics or <whatever>.

I'm sure that right now you have pretty good idea of who "them" is for you.

- By *predisposition* ... I mean that it's the intention of my heart to be gracious though I sometimes fail to be; that I have decided in advance that this is how I want to live though I sometimes don't. It means that I'm committed as

God gives me strength to seeing *them* and treating *them* in the same gracious way that He has treated me.

- By *unconditional* ... I mean that people don't need thank me, love me, make it up to me, or promise do the right thing by me in order for me to have this predisposition towards you. My intention is to treat you better than I think you deserve with no strings attached.
- By *better than they deserve* ... I mean ... well, let me give you an example. Actually, let me let Jesus give you an example.

In Matthew chapter 20, we read that He once told a story about a crazy farmer; a

farmer unlike any farmer that you and I have ever met or heard about.¹

It's harvest time, Jesus says. Work is plentiful. And every morning the farmers go to the center of town to recruit workers for their fields.

But there's so much work that the farmer in Jesus' story goes back into town in the late afternoon and finds that there are more workers hanging around waiting to be hired. Given the time of year and the amount of work that needs to be done, one can assume that these folks had stayed up very late the night before and they showed up very late in the day. They were certainly undisciplined and probably lazy.

However, the farmer needs all the help he

can get, and so, Jesus says, he recruits them, too, and they go out into his fields as the daylight is beginning to fade. And when the daylight finally does fade, it's pay time for everyone who worked that day.

And as all the workers line up to receive their wages, the great surprise is that these latecomers receive a full day's pay *just as if they had showed up at daybreak.*

And because of that, Jesus says ...

When those hired first [the early in the day guys] came to get their pay, they assumed they would receive more. But they, too, were paid a day's wage.

When they received their pay, they protested to the owner, "Those people worked only one

hour, and yet you've paid them just as much as you paid us who worked all day in the scorching heat.” Matthew 20:12 (NLT)

Translation: “It’s not fair.”

Jesus said that ...

He (the farmer) answered one of them, “Friend, I haven’t been unfair! Didn’t you agree to work all day for the usual wage?

“Take your money and go. I wanted to pay this last worker the same as you. Is it against the law for me to do what I want with my money? Should you be jealous because I am kind to others?” Matthew 20:15 (NLT)

Now, what’s fascinating about this story is

that the first part of it would have been familiar to those who heard Jesus tell it. That's because other rabbis of his day told a similar story but, in their version, those who worked for one hour got a whole day's pay *because they worked so hard in that hour*. In other words, they were worth the money they got paid and they proved it.

But in Jesus' version of the story, the emphasis is not on the diligence and worthiness of the late-afternoon workers. They were anything but.

Instead, it's on the crazy farmer's insanely *gracious act* to people who did not deserve it and did not earn it.

And Jesus is saying, "This, friends, is what your Father in Heaven is like. He acts in

ways that, by your measuring scale, seem unfairly gracious to sinners. He treats them far better than they deserve.”

And that’s the model for us in being gracious to “them” – who ever “them” is for us. Sometimes, it’s going to look and feel a little crazy.

And, in the next two messages that follow this one, I want us to apply this definition to two specific cases that I see all the time as a pastor; two specific cases where we need to be gracious but where it’s also very challenging and a little crazy.

- The first case (which we’ll talk about next week) is when values clash. What

does it look like to be gracious to someone who doesn't hold the same values we do? When there's tension because they believe one way and we believe another?

This is so critical especially to individual Christians who have friends and family members or co-workers who are not Christians and who think we're close-minded, bigoted and intolerant. How we treat them when our values clash has a huge impact.

- The second case (which we'll look at in two weeks) is when sin gets personal. What does it look like to be gracious to someone who *does* have the same values we do – someone who *is* a Christian – but doesn't act like a

Christian towards us?

This is so critical especially to churches where because of the nature of people – we’re all sinners – we’re going inevitably find ourselves hurt or offended by someone who is a brother or sister in Christ. How we handle those kinds of situations says a lot to the world because the world is watching.

A Few Clarifications

So, that’s where this is going after today, but, in order for us to be able to talk about those situations, we need to make a few clarifications because a lot of people confuse graciousness with things like niceness, permissiveness and tolerance. But

they are not the same. It's actually a lot harder to be gracious than it is to just be nice or permissive or tolerant.

Graciousness – the unconditional predisposition to treat “them” better than they deserve ...

Graciousness is patient but not permissive. It does not lower the standard.

Right is still right and wrong is still wrong. Grace doesn't change the standards.

In fact, when you read the Sermon on the Mount, the same Jesus who tells the story of the crazy farmer and his insanely better-than-they-deserve treatment of late and lazy workers ... the same Jesus who says that we should love “them” because God's

grace is so amazing that it somehow blesses the evil as well as the good ... this same Jesus, in the Sermon on the Mount, keeps raising the bar so high that no one can meet it.

“You don’t murder?” he says. “That’s great, but do you blow up in silly anger with your brother or sister? That’s on the same level in God’s sight.”

“You don’t commit adultery?” he says. “Good for you, but do you lust? Those are on the same level in God’s sight.”

Jesus raises the bar so high that no one can meet it, and yet provides the safety net of grace. He tells us that we don’t have to gain God’s approval by jumping over the bar.ⁱⁱ

What grace does, practically speaking, is to *give people time and space to move in the direction* of getting it right without condemning them while they continue to get it wrong. Grace is patient but it's not permissive.

When we treat *them* better than they deserve, that doesn't mean changing the standards. It doesn't mean redefining right and wrong. As one writer puts it, "God does not revoke the nature of his righteousness to accommodate human rebellion."

That's the first clarification. Here's the second.

Graciousness – the unconditional predisposition to treat "them" better than they deserve ...

Graciousness is tolerant but not passive. It intervenes when necessary.

Now, I'm sure you're aware that in our culture, tolerance has become the ultimate virtue. The only thing that's condemnable these days is intolerance. *We simply will not tolerate intolerance ...* which is, of course, logically indefensible, as it is the height of intolerance.

Be that as it may, in practice "tolerance" means that no one has the right to question or warn or evaluate the actions or behaviors of another person. Live and let live. You do your own thing, I'll do mine. Whatever you think is right for you is right for you and it is not my place to question.

And there is an element of graciousness in

that. If I disagree with you, I will attempt to treat you better than I think you deserve by not shaming you or condemning you. In that way, graciousness is tolerant.

However, in the same way that God does not simply abandon human beings to the “devices and designs of our own hearts” (to quote the Book of Common Prayer), to be gracious doesn’t mean washing our hands and passively allowing someone to continually engage in behavior that is destructive to themselves and others.

Instead, it means recognizing that an out-of-control person is at the mercy of a force within that he or she may not be able to withstand alone.

And then, understanding what it is like to be in that same kind of situation (because

we too are sinners!), graciousness intervenes strongly and unconditionally on the side of what is good for the person ...

... standing *with them* in the battle instead of standing *against them* in judgment (and condemnation).ⁱⁱⁱ

Sometimes treating a person better than he or she deserves means getting down into the muck and mire and helping them do battle with forces that are beyond their control. Sometimes confronting foolish and destructive behavior with truth is the most gracious thing we can do for a person. Truth and grace are not opposites. They are co-laborers in producing freedom.

Of course, that doesn't mean your efforts will be appreciated. When a lifeguard jumps in the water to save a drowning person, a

lot of times that person fights against the lifeguard. And the same thing can happen when graciousness has to intervene because graciousness is tolerant but it's not passive.

Of course *that* means that graciousness is also “fuzzy.” It requires constant wisdom and discernment.

Graciousness isn't black and white. There is no formula for it. There's no “if A happens, I should do B. If C happens, I should do D.” What you and I do to be gracious to one person might not be the same as what we do to another.

And that's why, when you try to be gracious – when you try to treat “them” better than they deserve – you often feel

like you're stuck in the middle between patience and permissiveness: *am I waiting for this person to get it, or am I actually just lowering the bar?*

You feel like you're stuck in the middle between being tolerant and passive: *am I allowing this person space to figure it out and to be their own person or am I actually just taking pass on getting involved because intervening could get really messy?*

Graciousness – the unconditional predisposition to treat “them” better than they deserve is fuzzy because better is not always clear and it's not always the same from person to person and situation to situation. It requires constant wisdom and discernment.

And that's what we're going to focus on in the next two weeks: how to be wise and discerning. When to be tolerant and when to intervene. How to show patience without lowering the standard.

But there's one more thing and this isn't really a clarification as much as it is a re-statement of something I said earlier.

Graciousness is often painful, which is why we must have a constant connection to the source of grace, Jesus.

When you decide that your unconditional predisposition towards "them" is going to be one of treating them better than they deserve, you're going to have to develop the ability to take a punch. Just as Jesus had to suffer in order to provide grace, you're

going to have to suffer as well.

And the only way you do that; the only way you can develop “the patience to endure injustice, disgrace, and mistreatment without retaliation, bitterness, or vengeance”^{iv} over the long haul, I believe, is to never forget that you are being treated better than you deserve by God.

It really is true: graced people grace people.

Would you stand for closing prayer?

PRAYER & CLOSING COMMENTS

<prayer>

Before you leave ... receiving offering at the door.

- If you are planning to do a random act of giving this morning to our ministry, thank you so much for that. We appreciate it.
- If you're going to put in a check or cash as part of your plan for a premeditated, calculated, designated emancipation of your personal financial assets, we appreciate that as well.
- If you're thinking "I need to do this generosity thing" we have a table set up where you can get help/info about signing up for online recurring donations and, also, info about our Good Sense financial counseling ministry. We have that set up behind a screen so that your conversation with

our team is private.

Ok, have a great rest of your weekend and we'll see you next Sunday.

Endnotes

i Note that this section is based on Brennan Manning's talk *Healing Our Image of God and Ourselves*, July 8, 2007.

ii <http://philipyancey.com/q-and-a-topics/grace>

iii This is an application of a passage from *Beyond Deserving*, a book quoted at <http://www.mbird.com/2007/12/beyond-deserving/>

iv John MacArthur