

Stand Firm in God's Grace (Part 8)

Introduction:

The servant struggled to get away as guards man-handled him into the king's presence. Over and over again, the man had borrowed money from the king's treasury; perhaps embezzled would be the better word. What had he done with the money? Perhaps he started failed businesses, built large houses, bought nice clothes, purchased chariots and horses. Maybe he used this money to try to make money off his fellow servants by loaning to them. His family had lived high on the hog. They must have had lots of friends with all that money rolling through their fingers. No doubt, he assumed someday he would get the money back in the accounts and straighten out the books. But the debt had mounted so high and the king had examined the books when the servant wasn't expecting it. They were off by 10,000 talents. According to Warren Wiersbe, the entire tax levy in Palestine was only 800 talents per year. Further, it would take a common man 20 years to earn one talent.¹ That means this debt was equivalent to 200,000 years' salary. This man had gone through the loot for a long time. As the man stood there trembling, the king pronounced the sentence, "Sell this man. Sell his wife. Sell his children. Sell his house and everything in it. Do the best you can to pay this off." As the king began to wave him away, the man fell to his knees. Amazingly enough, he seemed to think he could pay this debt off if given enough time. As the king heard the man's imploring cry, he felt pity and compassion. There was no way the man could do what he had claimed he would try. In an amazing gesture of grace and mercy, the king forgave the servant's debt and released him.

That should have been a life-changing moment. Having experienced the grace of his master should have set his life on a new course. But it didn't. He still seemed to see others as tickets for his own agenda. Immediately, he went out and found another servant who owed him about 1/3 of a year's salary. No doubt, that sum is nothing to scoff at. It was sizable. It meant something to him. It was definitely a personal hit. It would probably be painful to let that go. But this guy had just been forgiven the equivalent of 200,000 years' salary. Surely, he could pay the grace forward and forgive a fellow servant 1/3 of a year's salary. But he didn't. He seized the fellow, began to choke him, then, despite the pleas, cast him into prison (a place where he surely would be unable to pay the debt).

What happened next is sad but understandable. The king heard of this servant's faithlessness and hypocrisy. He called the servant back into his presence. The merciful gift was removed. He was cast into debtor's prison. The servant had fallen from his master's grace and the outcome was more than he could bear (**Matthew 18:21-35**). This story highlights our final key for Standing Firm in God's Grace. If we want to avoid falling away from God's grace, by standing right in the middle of it, we must 1) recognize our need for God's grace, 2) listen to God's word, 3) hope fully in God's grace, 4) live by faith and not by law, 5) keep God's grace pure, 6) rely on God's strength, 7) give God the glory, and finally 8) we must let God's grace be our example and guide for our relationships and interactions with others. We must Pay God's Grace Forward.

Discussion:

I. Grow healthy boundaries

- A. I know this seems like a very odd place to start the process. However, you need to understand that grace is a gift. Therefore, you are only offering grace to someone if you are giving it freely. Growing healthy boundaries is the key to governing your relationships in grace.
- B. Consider the difference in the following two scenarios. 1) You give me \$100 for my birthday. 2) You give me \$100 because I'm holding you at gunpoint.
 1. In both cases, the outcome is the same. I now have \$100 more than I did moments ago and you have \$100 less. In both cases, your \$100 serves and benefits me. In both cases, me getting the \$100 cost you something; it is a sacrifice on your part.
 2. But the first scenario is grace. The second is stealing.
- C. Now consider the difference in the following scenarios. 1) You give me \$100 for my birthday because you love me and find joy in giving to me. 2) You give me \$100 for my birthday because I gave you \$100 for Christmas and you think you owe me. Or you give me \$100 for my birthday because I've laid a guilt trip on you for making so much more money than me. Or you give me \$100 for my birthday because you are afraid if you don't keep giving me bigger and bigger gifts for my birthday that I'm going to quit loving you and being your friend.

¹ Warren Wiersbe, The Bible Exposition Commentary: New Testament, Victor, Colorado Springs, 2001, vol 1, p 67.

1. As above, in both cases, the outcome is the same. I now have \$100 more than I did moments ago and you have \$100 less. In both cases, your \$100 serves and benefits me. In both cases, me getting the \$100 cost you something; it is a sacrifice on your part.
 2. But the first scenario is grace. While the second series of scenarios may not be considered stealing legally, emotionally and spiritually they are no better than theft. They are not grace. There is none of the love, peace, and joy that comes from extending grace to others. There is only resentment, bitterness, and fear.
- D. How do we make sure we are giving grace rather than being emotionally, mentally, and spiritually robbed? We start by growing healthy boundaries. Obviously, we could have an entire series on this point alone. Maybe we will at a later date. However, the great passage on understanding healthy boundaries is **Galatians 6:2, 5**. This is another one of those paradoxes, statements that seem to contradict but actually contain a profound truth. Paul essentially says, "Bear one another's burdens because each must bear his own burden." What does he mean?
1. The point is that there are burdens with which everyone needs help sometimes. God has put us together to help each other. We lift each other up, encourage each other, comfort each other, help each other instead of biting and devouring one another (**Galatians 5:15**) or in conceit provoking and envying one another (**Galatians 5:26**).
 2. However, there is at the same time a burden that is strictly my own. I have responsibilities and you are not responsible for them. Of course, one of my responsibilities is to help when you need help. But it is not my responsibility to fulfill your responsibilities.
 3. This is the essence of healthy boundaries. You may have gotten yourself caught in some kind of trespass, finding yourself in a bind that you can't handle on your own. As your brother in Christ, instead of vaunting myself with conceit for not having gotten in the same bind, I help you bear your burden. But, it is not my responsibility to provide for your family. It is your responsibility. Therefore, I do not have to be terrorized, guilted, or manipulated into becoming your family's provider (even if you are my grown child, by the way).
- E. The whole point here is to recognize that any serving or giving you are doing from fear, guilt, shame, or manipulation is not really grace. You can only pay God's grace forward if you have grown healthy boundaries such that what you give is done with grace and thankfulness for the opportunity rather than bitterness and resentment.²

II. Respect others

- A. In **Galatians 5:26; 6:3**, Paul speaks against the conceited who think they are something when they are nothing. This is not about what we think of ourselves by ourselves, but what we think of ourselves in comparison to others. Arrogance and conceit is not simply thinking we are more than others, but also thinking that others are less than us. If I am conceited and think of others as less-than, I will never pay God's grace forward to them.
- B. As Paul says in **Romans 12:3**, we must not think too highly of ourselves, which in turn means not to think too lowly of others. He goes on in **Romans 12:9-10** to say we must love genuinely and outdo one another in showing honor. Then in **Romans 12:16**, he proclaims we must live in harmony with one another by associating with the lowly. That is, we must recognize that everyone is worthy of our company. We can learn and benefit from everyone; even those we might think are lowly.
- C. In **Luke 18:9-14**, the Pharisee looked down on the tax collector. And yet, the Pharisee should have spent some time with him, learning from him. The Pharisee had no grace for the tax collector because he did not respect him as a person, a fellow child of God. He saw the tax collector simply as a lesser mortal, to which he could compare himself and be seen as someone worthy. Oddly, that is not how God viewed it. He justified the tax collector instead. In like manner, Simon the Pharisee had no grace for the sinful woman who washed Jesus' feet in **Luke 7:36-39**. He couldn't see the value that God placed on her. He only saw the sins she had committed. He let her sins devalue her. He had no respect for her at all. He placed no value on her. He didn't see what he could learn from her. Yet, she went away forgiven, and he went away rebuked.
- D. We devalue and disrespect people for all kinds of things. We may disrespect them because of their race, gender, socio-economic status, job, level of education, intelligence, ignorance, nationality, age, morality, church affiliation, ability, troubles, struggles, sins, and even their politics. We may disrespect people because they are just weird. For one reason or another we look at some people and decide they are less-than. They are not worth our time or our effort. We couldn't get anything out of them. And therein is the problem. We too often only look at people for what we can get out of them. In that case, even when we are placing a high value on them, we are still disrespecting them because they are nothing more to us than a tool to get what we want. **John 3:16** says God so loved the world He sent His Son to die for it. That means God placed a value on that person you are looking at. We need to respect and value them on that basis. Only then can we pay God's grace forward.

III. Acknowledge God's grace in your life

² For more study on growing healthy boundaries, I highly recommend Boundaries: When to Say Yes, How to Say No To Take Control of Your Life by Cloud and Townsend, published by Zondervan.

- A. This gets us back to our opening story of the unforgiving servant found in **Matthew 18:21-35**. This guy's biggest problem was he felt entitled. He did not acknowledge the king's grace in his life. It never occurred to him that the only reason he was able to find this other servant was because his master had not sold him to a faraway king or thrown him into debtor's prison himself. You know, it is very likely the second servant's debt was produced because the first servant loaned the king's money to him. He didn't acknowledge the grace that came from the king not expecting that money back.
- B. Clearly, the grace extended to the first servant was immense and amazing. He was forgiven 200,000 years' worth of debt. That kind of grace should change a person. But it won't if he doesn't acknowledge it for its immense nature. If the receiver of the grace views himself as entitled, the grace won't change him. So, to acknowledge God's grace in your life you have to acknowledge your own debt. You also have to acknowledge your own unworthiness. Consider again the stories of the Pharisees we referenced in the previous point in **Luke 7** and **18**. Neither Pharisee recognized their own sinfulness. Neither acknowledged their own unworthiness. They both saw themselves as worthy and entitled. Because of that, they were unable to pay forward God's grace to others.
- C. Further, we need to acknowledge when God extended this grace to us. According to **Romans 5:6-8**, He did this while we were weak, ungodly, and still sinners. Where would you be if God had waited for you to shape up before He began working on your behalf to bring grace into your life? What if God had waited until you were strong, godly, and sinless? How would you have fared? Sadly, I think at times we practice a kind of Social Darwinism or perhaps I should say Spiritual Darwinism. Spiritually, we play a game of survival of the fittest. If someone is in trouble and needs grace from us, we convince ourselves not to give it to them because their very weakness means they don't deserve the grace. The problem is if they deserved it, it wouldn't be grace. To play this game, we have to deny God's involvement in our lives. This is why acknowledging God's grace in our lives is so important. It frees us to pay God's grace forward to others.

IV. Comprehend the spirit you are of

- A. In **Luke 9:51-56**, Jesus was refused the hospitality of a Samaritan village. James and John, the sons of thunder, asked permission to call down fire from heaven. They wanted to bring judgment on this village. They wanted to put that village in its place. They wanted to show those Samaritans what happens when someone violates the law of God and disrespects the Lord's anointed. According to some manuscripts, Jesus responded with rebuke, saying, "You do not know what kind of spirit you are of; for the Son of Man did not come to destroy men's lives, but to save them" (**Luke 9:55-56**, NASU). While some dispute the validity of this text, it fits within the context of Jesus' ministry and teaching. In **John 12:47**, Jesus explained He did not come to judge the world, but to save it.
- B. More often than not, Christians don't take God's grace to the world. We take God's law. When we take God's law are we doing so to highlight the need for grace? Or are we simply trying to encourage sinners to measure up as we sometimes pretend we do? Are we teaching they need to change and keep the law so they can be worthy of grace as we sometimes pretend we are? Too often Christians administer God's law because we want to put sinners in their place. We want to prove we are better and they are worse; we are more-than, they are less-than. Too often, we are like the older brother of **Luke 15:25-32**. Because we have not acknowledged God's grace in our lives, we wrongly act as if we do not need grace (the older brother declared he had never disobeyed the father), as if we are not standing firm in God's grace but standing firm in our own personal strength and righteousness. So we roll out God's law and beat them with it. That is, if we'll get close to them. Too often we really are like the older brother refusing to even get close to those who need God's grace.
- C. If we are going to be like our Master, we must learn that we are not of a spirit of judgment, condemnation, and destruction. We are of a spirit of salvation. Our job is not to judge and condemn. Our job is to bring about salvation. Do not misunderstand. I'm not saying we pay God's grace forward by ignoring sin and forgetting God's law. The reason we need to pay God's grace forward is because God has a law and folks have sinned against it. Rather, we need to learn why we bring up God's law. We do so to point them to their need for God's grace. Nor am I saying that we never have to make a judgment in the sense that we judge or discern that someone has violated God's law and is, therefore, in need of God's grace. I'm saying that it is not our job to judge in the sense of condemning and punishing the sinners around us. According to **II Timothy 2:24-26**, as we teach, rebuke, and correct we must be gentle and kind because the folks we are speaking with are prisoners of war. They have been captured by the devil to do his will. They are sheep in desperate need of a good Shepherd (**Matthew 9:36**).
- D. Look again in **Luke 7:36-50**. Simon looked at the sinful woman through the lens of the law. She had violated more of the laws than he had (at least he thought so), so he brought forth condemnation on her and anyone who touched her. But Jesus looked at her through the lens of grace. He did not ignore her sin. But He didn't beat her with the law against fornication. Rather, He offered her the grace to become free from fornication. She accepted it, loved Him for it, and apparently overcame her fornication. Too often, when others will not immediately receive Jesus or His will, we want to call fire down from heaven upon them, punishing them for violating the law (at least until they

shape up). We need to comprehend what kind of spirit we are of. We need to remember we are here to participate in Jesus' work of saving sinners, not calling righteous people (**cf. Mark 2:17**).

V. Endow others with grace

- A. Now that we have walked this path, we are ready to pay God's grace forward. We are ready to endow others with grace. I did not choose the word "endow" simply because it began with the letter "e" and helped complete my acrostic for the word "GRACE." I also chose it because "endow" connotes giving a large gift. For instance, giving a book to a college is a donation; giving a library to the college is an endowment.
- B. Look again at our original story in **Matthew 18:28**. The second servant owed 100 denarii. That is the equivalent to 100 days' wages or about 1/3 of an annual salary. If we take that amount all by itself, it's actually a pretty good hunk. What if I were to ask you to loan me 1/3 of your salary for this year? What if I were to ask you to just give me 1/3 of your salary this year? Any takers? I am afraid that because of the comparison made in this parable, I have missed Jesus' point a little bit. Because the second servant's debt was so small in comparison to the first's, I've had the idea that Jesus was saying the first servant should have been gracious because the other servant's debt was no big deal, it was meaningless, pointless. That isn't Jesus' point at all. 1/3 of an annual salary is a big deal, it is meaningful, it will hurt to let that go. Jesus' point is we need to pay the grace forward because even though the grace we offer others is a big deal, it is small potatoes compared to what God has done for us. If He could extend such immense grace toward us, how much more can we pay that grace forward to each other.
- C. Endow others with grace by...
 1. ...restoring others with gentleness when they sin (**Galatians 6:1**).
 2. ...offering them forgiveness when they repent, even if it's seven times in one day (**Luke 17:3-4**).
 3. ...sharing what you have with others (**Hebrews 13:16**).
 4. ...comforting others in affliction (**II Corinthians 1:4**).
 5. ...rejoicing with those who rejoice and weeping with those who weep (**Romans 12:15**).
 6. ...sacrificing for others, even financially (**II Corinthians 8:1-4**).
 7. ...declaring the gospel message to them (**Romans 10:13-17**).
 8. ...welcoming, receiving, accepting one another as Jesus has you without regard for differences or past (**Romans 15:7**).
 9. ...honoring those that you think less honorable (**I Corinthians 12:22-25**).
 10. ...serving others sacrificially, even those who cannot pay you back (**John 13:1-20; Luke 14:12-14**).
 11. ...etc.

Conclusion:

If we want to stand firmly in God's grace, we have to pay it forward. We have to live in God's grace, letting it be the example and guide for how we conduct our relationships and interactions with others. When we actually learn to do this, not only will we stand in God's grace, but we will be doing so because we will have become like God in His grace. Philip Yancey tells a story of a friend who worked with the down-and-out in Chicago. A prostitute came to the man with a story of despair. She told of drug abuse and renting out her own daughter. She didn't know what to do. The fellow didn't know what to tell her. He finally asked if she'd ever thought of going to church for help. "I will never forget the look of pure, naïve, shock that crossed her face. 'Church!' she cried. 'Why would I ever go there? I was already feeling terrible about myself. They'd just make me feel worse.'"³ What a shocking response considering the fact that it was the sinners and prostitutes that came to Jesus for help. Why? Because He brought them the grace that could change their lives. I know we struggle with paying this kind of grace forward because one of the first times I used this illustration, a well-meaning brother met me at the door and said the problem there was the woman's own guilty conscience. I suggest that may well be. But I can't help noticing that the guilty consciences of the sinners and prostitutes around Jesus didn't keep them away from Him. Why should they keep the same people away from us? If we learn to pay God's grace forward as Jesus did, then I am convinced more people than we can imagine will be brought to Jesus through that grace so that they may overcome their sins and guilty consciences. Don't sit in God's grace, stand firmly in it and pay it forward.

³ Philip Yancey, *What's So Amazing about Grace*, Zondervan, Grand Rapids, 1997, p 11; *The Jesus I Never Knew*, Zondervan, Grand Rapids, 1995, pp 147-148.