

**Living By Grace**  
Part 1 of Good News about Grace  
Part 2 of Living in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century  
Rev. Jean Smith

I'm going to give you some incomplete sentences and see if you can finish them. Just shout out the answers if you know them. Ok? Here we go:

- If it sounds too good to be true, it is.
- I make my money the old fashioned way, I earn it!
- There's no such thing as a free ride or a free lunch.
- Pull yourself up by your boot straps.
- You reap what you sow.
- God helps those who help themselves.

These sayings are so familiar to us because they represent what we call the American Work Ethic, which is one thing that makes our nation such a great country. As mainstream Americans we take pride in hard work, sweat, effort and performance. We're proud of the fact that we work hard and pay our own way. But if we aren't careful, that attitude can keep us from understanding God's grace. We can get so caught up in trying to make ourselves acceptable to God, that we miss what grace is all about.

You may think you understand God's grace. You may know in your head that you are saved by God's grace. You may have known that for years. But I've discovered that many Christians, although they know they're saved by grace, they don't act like it. In fact, they spend much of their life thinking and acting like they're saved by works.

When you really understand grace, it brings so much joy to your life. It is the most liberating thing in the world. You see, God doesn't relate to us on the basis of our effort, or our work, or our merit or even how hard we try. The Bible says that everything God does in our lives, every blessing we have, the happiness we enjoy, the peace we experience, the joy that fills our hearts, the right relationship we have with God, all these things are evidence of God's grace in our lives. They are gifts from God and they represent God's grace to us.

You might be thinking, "Wait a minute. What do you mean? I work for the things I have that make my life enjoyable. I've earned the good life. I've made the sacrifices and put in the long hours of work to get what I have." But think about that for just a moment. It is God who has given you the brains in your head, the strength in your body, and the people in your life who have helped you to develop your work ethic and gave you the opportunity to work hard and earn a living. It is God who gives you the healthy body and even the energy to do the work you do. It is God who gives you the air you breathe. Every breath you take is a gift from God.

The truth is: God doesn't owe you your next breath. You'll take your next breath because a gracious God allows you to. God doesn't own you anything. He's not obligated to bless you. The blessings you enjoy are gifts from a gracious God.

The Bible teaching us that God is a god of grace. He saves us by grace. He blesses us by grace. He teaches us by grace. He sustains us in our faith by his grace, not letting one of us fall from His grace. God gives us eternal life by his grace. Everything in our lives that is good is given to us by God's grace. 1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians 15:10 it says, *"Whatever I am now, it is all because God poured out such kindness and grace on me."* And in John 1:16 it says, *"From the fullness of His grace we have all received one blessing after another."*

For many people the concept of God's grace completely eludes them. They simply don't get it. You can tell in the way they fail to show grace to others. That's the thing about grace - once you really understand it you begin to show it to others. People who don't really get grace continually think God disapproves of them. They get up in the morning thinking, "God is mad at me today. He's ticked off at me for what I did yesterday." People who haven't really grasped grace think of God as unpleaseable. Nothing they ever do is good enough. The church is full of people who don't really understand God's grace.

There are many definitions of grace. Here are just a few. Grace is like a multi-faceted diamond. It has many sides to it. Grace is God's love in action. Grace is when God gives us what we don't deserve. Grace is what God covers us with so He no longer sees our faults and our shortcomings. Grace is what enables God to look at us and see only the goodness of Christ in us. Grace is what enables God to separate our sins from us, as far as the east is from the west, and no longer hold them against us. These are all good definitions of God's grace.

In order to help you remember what God's grace is, I'm going to give you an acrostic using the word "GRACE". Each letter will represent a different aspect of God's grace. This reminds me of the professor at Yale University who was invited to give an address to the incoming freshman class. He used the word Y-A-L-E as an acrostic in his message. Y stood for Youth, A stood for Attitude, L stood for Loyalty and E stood for Enthusiasm. The problem was he took twenty minutes to elaborate on each letter. When he finished, he sat down and said to his colleague, "So how did I do." The colleague said, "Fine. It was a little long. I'm just glad we don't work for the Massachusetts Institute of Technology or you'd still be talking." I promise I won't take that long on each letter in my acrostic.

The first letter is **G** and it stands for **GOD'S GIFT TO ME**. Grace is a total and complete gift from God. I've asked a lot of people this question: "What do you have to do to go to heaven?" Almost always the answer I get is: "You have to do more good in your lifetime than bad." Like God is up there looking down on us with a clip board and pen in his hand,

keeping track of what we do - ok, that was good, oh dear, that was bad, good, good, oh dear, another bad. That kind of thinking leads us to believe that when we die, God is going to tally up all that we've done and if we have more good things listed than bad things, then we'll get into heaven. That is not the Christian faith. That is not what the Bible teaches. That is not living by God's grace. That's the most common answer I've gotten from people to that question. I'm talking church people here, not just people off the street. Most people like to think of themselves as good enough to get into heaven but bad enough to be fun. That's their goal in life.

Here's the problem - there's not a snowball's chance in h--- you're going to make it into heaven without God's grace. Someday I will have to stand before God and give an account for how I have served you as a pastor and God is going to hold me accountable for telling you that. In and of yourself, you will never be good enough to go to such a perfect place as heaven. There's no way you can ever work hard enough to earn your way into heaven. You can't buy your way into heaven. The song that says, ***"I'm gonna buy me a long white robe, yes Lord, to get me home"*** has a catchy tune but its BAD theology. The robe we need to be wearing in order to get into heaven isn't something we can buy. It can only be obtained through faith in Christ Jesus and what he has done for us. It is made out of the righteousness of Christ and not our own righteousness lest anyone can boast.

The Bible says there's only one way you're going to get into heaven and that is by the gift of God's grace. There's no way to earn your way into heaven. You can't just learn your way in. You can't buy your way in. You can't work your way in or get enough brownie points or credits to get in. There's no other way to make it into heaven except by receiving the gift of God, the gift of His grace with the empty hands of faith.

The Bible says in Romans 11:6, ***"If it is by grace, it is no longer on the basis of works. Otherwise grace would no longer be grace."*** Grace is a gift freely given. That's the definition of a GIFT - something that is freely given. The Bible says, ***"For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—not by works, so that no one can boast."*** (Eph 2:8-9) Can you imagine how miserable we would be if we got to heaven and we had all earned our way there? Imagine the bragging that would be going on and how miserable we'd all be because of it. No, that's not going to be what will be going on because salvation is a gift. It's not something we make happen.

This is the fundamental difference between Christianity and all the other religions of the world. All the other religions can be summarized in one word - **"do"** because you have to do certain things to earn God's favor. Depending on the religion there's a different "to do" list. The "to do" lists may be different, but they all have one thing in common. You have to earn God's approval. Christianity, on the other hand, can be summarized by the word **"done."** It's not what you do but what Christ has already done that saves you.

If anyone were to ask me what they have to do to be saved, I'd tell them, I'm sorry but you're too late. What you need to do has already been done 2000 years ago on a cross outside Jerusalem. There's nothing more you can do to add to what was done for you on the cross. Grace is God's gift of salvation to you. You ask, but what can I do? What is my part? What do I contribute? **The only thing you contribute to your salvation is your lostness!** That's your only contribution. You got yourself lost and God's gift to you is that He found you. Romans 3:24 says, *"...all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified freely by [God's] grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus."*

God's grace is a gift from God which is received by faith. **The letter R stands for RECEIVED BY FAITH.** God's grace is like an inheritance or any other gift; you must take hold of it somehow and make it your own. We receive God's grace by trusting in what Jesus has already done for us on the cross. The Bible says, *"...to all who received him, to those who believed in his name [that means put their faith in him] he gave the right to become children of God—children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband's will, but born of God."* (John 1:12-13) And in Romans chapter 4, verse 16 it says, *"...the promise comes by faith, so that it may be by grace."*

The third letter in the acrostic is **A** and it stands for **AVAILABLE TO EVERYONE.** God's gift of grace is available to everyone. God's grace is offered to everyone, regardless of who they are, where they were born, or even what they have done. The Bible tells us, *"Everyone who calls upon the name of the Lord shall be saved."* (Romans 10:13) The good news of the gospel is available to everyone in the whole wide world. No matter what you've done and no matter who you are God's grace is available to you.

The next letter is **C** and it stands for **COMES THROUGH CHRIST.** God's grace comes through Christ. Acts 15:12 says, *"We believe it is through the grace of our Lord Jesus that we are saved."* Why does God's grace only come through Christ? -Because He is the one who has purchased your salvation for you. He is the one who paid the penalty for your sins. No one else in all of human history has been worthy enough or willing enough to pay for your sins, and thereby cancel your debt before God. Grace is free to us but it was not free to Christ. He had to pay for it. The saying, "There is no free ride" is certainly true when it comes to our salvation. It cost Christ His life. Romans 5:15 says, *"Many people have received God's gift of life by the grace of the one man, Jesus Christ."*

A lot of people have never received God's gift of grace in Christ. They don't see the need to be saved. Or they don't want to come to Christ before they have all the fun they think they'd miss out on if they became a Christian too early in life. They don't understand how important it is to be prepared for something so inevitable, that could come at any time, and that is their own death. People need to receive Christ now while they still can. Salvation will not be offered in the life to come. We've got to receive Christ into our hearts in this

world because we won't be able to in the next. Jesus says, ***"I am the way, the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me."*** (John 14:6)

The fifth letter is E and it stands for **EXTENDS THROUGH ETERNITY**. The Bible says in Romans 6:23, ***"The wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life through Christ Jesus our Lord."*** God's grace isn't just for this world but for the next as well. It will carry us into eternity. It will never end.

I want to close by telling you about a man named Peter Drucker. Peter Drucker was a brilliant man who became known as the father of American management. He wrote a book over fifty years ago that is still considered today as the standard for business management courses in most business schools and universities across our nation. Drucker became a Christian late in his life, after he had achieved success and attained notoriety. When asked why he turned to Christ at that point in his life, he answered, ***"When I finally understood grace I realized I was never going to get a better deal than that."*** My friends, neither will we.

Grace is God's gift.

It is received by faith.

It is available to everyone.

It comes through Christ, and Christ alone.

It extends through all eternity.