

40 loaves

Breaking Bread with Our
Father Each Day



Daily Readings
to Renew a
Hungry Spirit

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Why does grace sometimes make me uncomfortable?

I recently had a conversation about grace with a woman. I started by saying that true followers of Jesus were forgiven for *everything*.

“You mean *all* sins?” she said.

“Yes.”

“No matter what?”

“Yes.”

She thought for a moment. “A Christian becomes an alcoholic?”

“Forgiven.”

“Steals from a charity?”

“Yes.”

“Gets a casual divorce...then remarries?”

“Yes.”

“Deceives a minister.”

“Of course.”

Her voice tightened; her lips curled. “Pornographer? Homosexual abortionist? Pedophile?”

“Forgiven.”

She narrowed her eyes. “And what if the same person did all those things?”

“Yep.”

She huffed and stormed away.

One dictionary defines grace as “unmerited favor.” A popular Bible dictionary defines it as “favor, kindness, friendship, forgiving mercy.”

Sounds nice. So why is it that some of us get antsy about grace? I’ve faced three objections. You may have some of your own.

1. Grace gone too far. The woman above wouldn’t have been angry with a *little* grace. She just didn’t like the idea of *so much* grace. Besides being unfair (see below), too much grace seemed risky to her. She feared it would encourage sin.

Hers seems like a reasonable argument.

2. *Too good to be true*. Some of us can’t imagine how anyone—even Christ—would want to offer mercy without conditions. There’s got to be a hitch.

Okay, not bad.

3. *Just not fair*. Some people work pretty hard at getting life right. Why should some loser get a clean slate?

Hard to argue with that one.

All these discomforts make sense. The whole notion of boundless, unqualified, unreserved grace for Jesus’s little flock breaks every rule of nature I know: “Give an inch, they’ll take a mile.” “Nuthin’s for nuthin’.” “A man reaps what he sows.”

But what if we take a *nonnatural* look?

1. *Grace Gone Too Far*

Well, biblically speaking, exactly how far *should* it go? Paul tells us in Romans 5:20 that “where sin increased, grace abounded all the more.” In Ephesians 1:7–8 we read that we are forgiven according to “the riches of His grace which He *lavished* on us.”

I’m not seeing limits here.

But what about encouraging sin?

Paul was criticized for that very thing. But he didn’t answer by shrinking grace. Instead, he expressed outrage at its abuse. “What shall we say then? Are we to continue in sin so that grace may increase? *May it never be!*” (Romans 6:1–2). Surely, a remorseless Christian better take another look at herself.

So how is grace abuse restrained?

Grace—properly understood—inspires gratitude. “For all things are for your sakes, *so that the grace which is spreading to more and more people may cause the giving of thanks* to abound to the glory of God” (2 Corinthians 4:15). Understanding the depth of our sin and the boundlessness of grace enables a life of obedience through the power of gratitude.

2. *Too Good to Be True*

For the word of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. (1 Corinthians 1:18)

Enough said.

3. *Just Not Fair*

Jesus dealt with this complaint in a parable in Matthew 20, where all the workers were paid the same regardless of how many hours they'd worked. It's true: mercy isn't fair. That's why it's called mercy.

Yes, grace really is unnatural...because it's supernatural.

However, in its unlimited, unfathomable, unmerited glory, grace is often not good news to control types, cynics, or the self-righteous. It doesn't affirm their worldviews.

But to the weak, the desperate, and the broken, grace is more than amazing. It's the astonishing gift of immeasurable love.

If we're uncomfortable with lavish grace, we might want to pause and consider why that is. It just may be that we're missing out on the really good part of the good news!



Food for Thought

How far do I think grace should go?

On what basis should it be limited?

Do I resent the forgiveness of the “undeserving”?

Do I think I'm deserving?

Has grace ever seemed amazing in my life?