

“The Concept of Grace”

Sunday School Discussion

For the

Discovery Class

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Bob Browning, Player/Coach/Referee

Let me share with you what I learned this week about the **concept of grace**. We hear a lot about **“grace”** in church and there is no shortage of books written on the subject. This week, though, I had a discussion with a group of people about grace that took my thoughts in a new direction, one that I liked. Gloria White, one of the counselors on staff at Smoke Rise, led the discussion.

Gloria believes that the more mature a person becomes, the more that individual becomes aware of his or her humanness. She refers to this as “being present with ourselves.” Most of us have no problem analyzing our mate, child, friend or co-worker, but we do not possess the ability to objectively look at ourselves or refuse to do it for a variety of reasons. We need, however, to be able to get outside ourselves and look at ourselves the same way we objectively look at others.

We need to define and identify what it means to be human and to be us in particular. We need to sort through the pieces of the puzzle that make up each of us, the good, the bad and the ugly. We need to see the good in our lives and let that contribute to a healthy self-esteem but we also need to see the bad and ugly and accept that they are parts of us, too. We need to quit denying that we can be jealous, greedy, vindictive, lazy, undisciplined, angry, temperamental, unforgiving, legalistic, rigid, controlling, promiscuous, critical, or any number of other things that make us undesirable to live with. Denial is deadly.

Instead of ignoring these traits, we need to talk to God about them. We need to talk to God about our humanness, who we are, what we are discovering about life, what we like about ourselves, what we don’t like and what we would like to change. We need to be as objective as we can and even ask Him to reveal things we overlook.

This is where grace comes in. Grace allows us to be this transparent before God. Grace tells us that it is ok to stand naked before God. He knows it all anyway. You are not revealing things to God, but yourself and the reason you do it in front of God is because you need His help to sort through it all and learn how to deal with it. You need a spiritual physician that will help you accept reality and teach you how to live with it.

Furthermore, grace enables us to celebrate our “being” even though we are not perfect.

Grace enables us to understand what it means to be “human,” a combination of the good, bad and ugly.

Grace enables us to learn about ourselves through life’s experiences, to see the hidden parts.

Grace helps us identify our undesirable traits and shows us two things about them. First, grace shows us where they will lead us if we let them control us. It shows us the harm we will do to others and us if we let them loose. Secondly, grace shows us how to control them rather than being controlled by them. Grace shows us how we can stare them in the face, identify them along with the desire to let them loose but refuse to do so.

Grace convinces us that, with God’s help, we can rise above the behavior our ugliest side would produce and then inspires us to do it. It allows us to tame the beasts inside us, not get rid of them necessarily, but acknowledge and confront them.

Grace reveals to us God’s true nature, His desire to transform us not condemn us. It encourages us see that God’s greatest goal is to help us become the beautiful people He intended for us to be when He created us. He’s not a critical parent but a helpful parent, a responsible and loving parent.

Listen to John 3:16-21, *“For God so loved the world that He gave His only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send His Son into*

the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him. Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already because he has not believed in the name of God's one and only Son. This is the verdict; Light has come into the world, but men loved darkness instead of light because their deeds were evil. Everyone who does evil hates the light and will not come into the light for fear that his deeds will be exposed. But whoever lives by the truth comes into the light, so that it may be seen plainly that what he has done has been done through God."

Grace enables us to be honest about who we are without fear of condemnation but with the hope of transformation. Jesus did not come with a light looking for pests to kill like an exterminator but with a light looking for survivors after a raging storm. He came to save us and he comes each day wanting to save us from our enemies, which sometimes is ourselves. And that process begins with humility and honesty on our part. We welcome the light in the dark places of our souls because we know it will lead to wholeness.

Grace offers forgiveness when we fail. When the ugly side of us wins, grace reassures us that it is not the end of the world. We'll have another chance to redeem ourselves.

Grace enables us to let others be human, too. It keeps us from trying to control them or make them what we want them to be but allows God to work in their lives just as He is ours.

Grace helps us to see what we cannot change or control and turn it over to God. This includes everyone in our lives. We cannot change anyone other than ourselves and grace tells us to quit trying. Instead, grace enables us to be the best we can be and trust God to help others do the same. If they don't let Him, grace enables us to love them anyway just as we need people to love us with our imperfections.

Grace enables us to let God minister to our own woundedness. It allows Him to bring healing into our lives along with a renewed sense of meaning and purpose.

Grace enables us to trust God even though we struggle to see how the pieces of the puzzle fit together.

Grace enables us to become intimate with God and others. People are drawn together by their weaknesses. Think about it. Your closest friends have been those you shared your fears, anxieties, worries, sorrows and dreams with. Grace allows you to be honest with others and reveal not only your good but also your bad and even ugly side.

Grace gives us permission to be "human." Some people are so hard on themselves for doing certain things or failing to do other things. Grace never condemns us for being "human" but always strives to help us see our humanness and teach us how dependent upon God we need to be in order to react or respond to situations in healthy and wholesome ways. Grace reminds us of our unhealthy tendencies or traits so that they never catch us off guard and take over our lives.

Have you ever watched a batting or hitting coach help a player? Once they diagnose what that player is doing that hurts their performance, they make the player aware of it. Then, when that player starts doing it, most of the time unconsciously, they tell them so they can make adjustments. "You're dropping your shoulder and not swinging level or you're not following through when you pitch." When a player hears this analysis, he can make necessary adjustments, which change the result. Grace is a spiritual coach.

As I said at the beginning, I like this concept of grace. It doesn't begin with my wretched condition and lead to guilt or shame. It doesn't encourage me to deny my humanity and ignore my feelings. It doesn't deceive me by telling me that I will no longer do some things if I am a believer. It doesn't give up on me when I make mistakes.

Instead, it teaches me what it means to be human and assures me that it is ok to define my humanity and identify every part of it. It encourages me to live in the real world determining what I can control and giving the rest to Him to nurture and guide. It motivates me to be the best that I can be by learning how to control the bad and ugly so that they do not make others and me miserable.

What do you think? Is this concept of grace different from what you have been taught or experienced?

This week's challenge: Spend time this week talking to God about you. Tell Him three things about you that you have never admitted to Him or anyone else. Get real with Him this week. Take your relationship with Him to a new level, a level of intimacy you have never experienced. Be vulnerable and transparent. Go where you have never gone before in your prayer life. Give it a try.