

What's So Amazing about Grace?

Philip Yancey

SERMON OUTLINE 1

No Strings Attached

Session 1

I. Introduction

- A. Jesus extended grace to the thief on the cross. It is a reminder that grace is for everyone. God longs to see people accept and live in His grace.
- B. Philip Yancey describes two visual word pictures of grace:
 - 1. The beauty of wildflowers—God fills the earth with beauty. Grace, like the beauty God surrounds us with, is all around us bringing beauty to barren places and hope to people.
 - 2. The power of water—The Grand Canyon is an example of the power of water. The spectacular landscape is carved entirely by water.
- C. Grace, like water, flows to the lowest part—to the most undeserving. Romans 3:23 reminds us that we are all undeserving because each of us falls short of the glory of God. We have all sinned.
 - 1. Grace is a gift freely given by God.
 - 2. Grace does not depend on what we have done, but on what God has done for us.
 - 3. Grace was demonstrated through the death of Jesus Christ on the cross.
- D. God mercifully and miraculously extends His love and grace to all.

II. Teaching

- A. Philip Yancey shares the stories of three people who have reached out to those who were needy and overlooked and demonstrated the gift of grace:
 - 1. Dr. Will Cooke: As a young physician in a small town in Indiana, he found himself at the epicenter of the nation's most serious drug-related HIV outbreak and later an opioid

addiction crisis. He had to overcome his prejudices. He decided it was his Christian responsibility to treat all people. Dr. Cooke made the choice not to see them as undeserving and gave them the care and treatment they needed.

2. Dr. C. Everett Koop: When AIDS began, he decided it was his obligation to treat those who were ill despite the reason they had contracted the disease. He fought to get information about the disease distributed nationwide and necessary care for those afflicted with AIDS. Dr. Koop, just like Dr. Cooke, looked to Jesus, the Great Physician, as his role model.
3. Diane Kamin served as Chaplain during the COVID-19 pandemic at a memory care facility. She sat with patients who couldn't know what was happening to them as they died and then shared the news with their loved ones. She put herself at risk. Why? Because God cares. Because Jesus says whatever you do to the least of these, you do to me.
4. Jesus was the first example of extending grace to those that society overlooked and ignored.
 - a. Jesus healed the woman who had been hemorrhaging blood for 18 years.
 - b. Jesus touched those afflicted with leprosy.
 - c. He healed the servant of a Roman soldier who was seen as an enemy by the people of Israel.
 - d. Jesus cared more about healing and loving people than what others might think or say about him.

That's what grace does: it goes to the lowest part, to those considered undeserving by the people around them.

- B. John 3:16-17 (Best known passage in the Bible.)
 1. Jesus himself was God's gift of grace.
 2. The Savior who came to rescue people and give them the gift of eternity.
 3. He was perfect, sinless and yet he treated everyone with mercy and love. By definition we are all undeserving, but still Jesus died for us.

III. Application

- A. Grace teaches us that God loves us because of who God is, not because of who we are.
- B. Think about your life. Are there people in your daily reach who others might consider “undeserving?”
 - 1. Hebrews 12:15 tells us to see to it that no one misses the grace of God.
 - 2. Now, go share the grace God offers with others.

“For God so loved the world. . .” That includes you and me. It’s amazing to think that we have been given God’s free gift of grace through Jesus Christ. We who are so undeserving, are loved that much!

SERMON OUTLINE 2

Dispensing Grace

Session 6

I. Introduction

- A. Philip Yancey speaks again of nature as a perfect picture of grace.
 - 1. God has surrounded us with beauty.
 - 2. Natural beauty is meant to be shared and enjoyed by others.
 - 3. He provides the example of “America the Beautiful” which was inspired by Pikes Peak in Yancey’s home state, Colorado.
- B. Grace, like natural beauty, should not be kept to ourselves.
 - 1. Philip Yancey refers to Christians as “dispensers of God’s grace to a thirsty world.”
 - 2. Followers of Jesus must take the gift of grace and spread it around. This is a challenge in a world where so many are skeptical or hostile concerning God’s message of grace.
- C. Philip Yancey and his wife decided to visit all the churches, 27 of them, and one synagogue in his small Colorado town. They noticed that some of the churches were thriving and some were not. The thriving ones focused on reaching out to the needy and putting faith into action.

II. Teaching

- A. Yancey wrote a sequel to *What’s So Amazing about Grace*. In *Vanishing Grace: Whatever Happened to the Good News*, Philip identifies three groups of people effective in dispensing God’s grace to skeptics.
 - 1. Activists: Christians who feel a specific calling around one issue.
 - a) Francis Collins devoted his life to bringing science and faith together. He headed up the effort to find treatment and a vaccine for COVID-19.
 - b) Bryan Stevenson works to free wrongly accused prisoners on death row.
 - c) Chuck Colson founded *Prison Fellowship*.
 - d) Gary Haugen tackles the problem of sex trafficking and child slavery.

These activists have attracted the world's attention, but there are countless others who work behind the scenes to dispense God's gift of grace. Philip Yancey shares the following illustration: "A mere sprinkling of salt can keep a whole piece of meat from spoiling. A tiny bit of yeast spreads throughout a lump of flour, causing a loaf of bread to rise. In the same way, acts of grace affect our entire society, preserving it from decay, bringing life and hope."

2. Artists: Christians who use their creative talents to tell God's story of grace in unique and powerful ways.

Actors and musicians craft God's story and present it around the world on everything from theater stages to city street corners. These creatives know how to draw an audience in and impact them in fresh ways that help them to experience and understand the Good News of the Gospel.

Painters, sculptors, and other visual artists who portray grace freely given by God in museums, art galleries, at exhibitions, businesses, homes and many other locations. Philip Yancey told the story of a 20th anniversary memorial service at Columbine High School where a Japanese-American artist used Kintsugi to share a visual picture with the audience. Kintsugi artists gather old, broken pieces of ceramic bowls, carefully put them back together, and mend the seams with pure gold transforming them into priceless works of art. This particular artist used a bowl that had been broken 400 years earlier to give the audience a new perspective on healing and God's grace.

3. Pilgrims can be the most effective grace-dispensers.
 - a. A pilgrim is an ordinary person trying to follow the Jesus way.
 - b. They aren't specialists or experts.
 - c. They aren't pastors or theologians.

B. The distinction of a believer is that we've admitted our need for God's grace. All the good in us begins with the Heavenly Father. We realize grace is a gift from above. We should want to share God's grace with others. In the early church in the first centuries after Jesus, Christians faced a far more hostile reception in the Roman empire than modern Christians face in the United states.

1. Jews viewed them as heretics and neighbors saw them as a cult.
2. A succession of Roman emperors tortured and killed them because of their faith.
3. Early Christians had no political power and no guarantee of religious

liberty. Instead, they worshiped together, studied the Bible, and lived out their faith for others to witness. In times of crisis, they took care of others who had been abandoned, oftentimes at their own risk. They dispensed God's grace.

4. It took about three centuries, but after observing the way the early Christians lived and loved others, the majority of the Roman empire accepted God's gift of grace.

III. Application

- A. Philip Yancey shared the story of a woman he met in Toronto, Canada. She told him she felt called to treat telephone solicitors with grace. She listened to all they had to say and then prayed with them. She told of times when there were other calls going on in the background, but still the person she was talking to would share their story and pray with her. That's what grace-dispensers do. They may not think they're changing the world, but bit by bit, like salt, like yeast, grace has its effect. That's how grace works.
- B. Apostle Paul's words from Romans 12:
 1. Hate what is evil; cling to what is good. Be devoted to one another in love. Honor one another above yourselves. Never be lacking in zeal, but keep your spiritual fervor, serving the Lord. Be joyful in hope, patient in affliction, faithful in prayer. Share with the Lord's people who are in need. Practice hospitality. (Rom. 12:9-13)
 2. Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse. Rejoice with those who rejoice; mourn with those who mourn. Live in harmony with one another. Do not be proud, but be willing to associate with people of low position. Do not be conceited. (Rom. 12:14-16)
 3. Do not repay anyone evil for evil. Be careful to do what is right in the eyes of everyone. If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone. Do not take revenge, my dear friends, but leave room for God's wrath, for it is written: "It is mine to avenge; I will repay," says the Lord. On the contrary: If your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink. In doing this, you will heap burning coals on his head." Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good. (Rom. 12:17-21)
- C. Paul is clear. These are not easy commands, but dispensing grace is worth the effort. When we follow Jesus and do these things the world will see, know, and understand God's gift of grace. Then we fulfill our calling as dispensers of God's grace.