

God's Amazing 'Cleaning-Us-Up' Grace
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Fourth in a series, "Amazed in God's Grace"

1st Peter 1.13-23

September 29, 2019

Please read the Scripture by clicking [here](#).

Let me re-read this part:

*Don't be conformed to your former desires,
those that shaped you when you were ignorant.
But, as obedient children,
you must be holy in every aspect of your lives,
just as the one who called you is holy.¹*

O dear.

This "being holy" talk makes me nervous. Those I've met who think they are "holy" too often seem judgmental, self-righteous and, frankly, unpleasant.

Of course I want to be better. I know I need to be more loving. I know I need to get my desires right, because too often I desire the wrong things, or the right things wrongly. I know my problems run deep. I need soul surgery. But it's hard to operate on yourself.

Then I went and re-read this:

*. . .place your hope completely on the grace
that will be brought to you when Jesus Christ is revealed.²*

God's grace. Amazing!

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I fell in love with grace.

Grace is what God at work looks like.

Grace is what God's heartbeat sounds like.

Grace is God saying: *"I love you. Yes, you! I know who you are. I know you better than you know you. I know the 'you' others can't see. I know the 'you' you pretend not to be. The 'you' that you can't bear to look at, I can't take my eyes off."* God's grace.

¹ vv. 14-15.

² v. 13b.

“I see your fear, your insecurity, your anger, your shame, your guilt. I see your hatreds, your prejudices, your abuses, your un-kindness, your un-love. I see your injuries weeping, your heart hardened. I see the sharpened quills that cover you, and I embrace you.” God’s grace.

Grace is God — perfectly good, perfectly pure, perfectly righteous, perfectly holy — insisting on being with you. Grace is God — un-spoil-able, un-tarnish-able, un-break-able — refusing anything less than becoming spoiled, tarnished, and broken for you.

Despite my worst efforts, grace is God refusing to let me go. And you. And everyone.

III

I want to celebrate God’s grace. These past weeks I’ve been zooming in on different ways God’s grace moves.³ I hope this helps you love God more strongly, thank God more extravagantly, and rest your trust in God more deeply.

I’ve talked about how God finds you. It’s like you’re stuck in a storm, trapped in the darkness; stuck in harmful desires, trapped in hurtful thoughts; stuck in your pain, trapped in guilt or shame. Jesus is your light, who comes into your darkness. Jesus is your rescue, who frees you from your trap. Jesus relentlessly finds you, God’s “going out to get us in” grace.

Jesus, who is perfect love, carried the cross of our hatred. Jesus, who gives life, carried the condemnation of our death. So he carries you with him into God’s household, God’s family. Jesus carries you! The effort is not yours. The initiative is not yours. You just trust. That’s faith. Trust him, and know you are safe.

Immediately when Jesus carries you in, you already belong. No need to prove yourself; Jesus is your proof. No need to give anything; Jesus has given everything. No need to worry anymore; Jesus is your assurance. God’s “making us right” grace.

Immediately when Jesus carries you in, you become something new. It’s like you are born all over again, a new creation! He begins new life in you: life abundant, life now and life forever. God’s “starting us fresh” grace.

All amazing!

³ Describing grace in this way does not mean God’s grace is segregated into different parts. It’s like if I sat down and analysed my wife’s love for me. I could describe how she showed love when we were first dating, then after we married, then today. I could detail the particulars of her love when we are on an adventure, then when we are cleaning up the yard, then when we are having a romantic dinner, then when we are in an argument. All this might be informative. No matter how good my description though, or how poorly done, it must not distract from the main point. It’s her who loves me, her who acts with love. She is a unity. She is one lover, who loves with one love. So with gratefulness, I love her even more.

IV

Then, God starts cleaning you up.

I put it this way last week. We are safe inside the house, but we're so used to the storm, we do not know to take our boots off. We are used to the dark; we have no clue how lights work. We are used to being wounded; we do not know how to be well. We are used to beating each other up; we do not know how to sit at the table together.

Remember what I read?

*Don't be conformed to your former desires,
those that shaped you when you were ignorant.⁴*

In other words, don't keep fitting to your in-the-dark, in-the-storm ways. We're freed from that.⁵

*. . . you must be holy in every aspect of your lives,
just as the one who called you is holy.⁶*

"Being holy," is learning to live free, like Jesus.

Here's good news. You can!

More good news. It's not a do-it-yourself project.

Remember?

. . . place your hope completely on the grace brought to you . . .

They call this "sanctifying" grace. God is making you holy, making you like Jesus. God is growing your love for God. God is teaching you to act with love for others, your neighbours, your enemies. God is shaping you into a caregiver for God's creation.

Amazing grace!

V

In the novel *The Shack*, Mack is a mess. He's broken by grief, tormented by injustice, consumed with guilt.

Then he has a profound experience of God. We're left unsure what to make of it, just that it was real.

⁴ v. 14 (Common English Bible).

⁵ v. 18.

⁶ v. 15.

In one part, the Holy Spirit, Sarayu, takes him to a garden. It's a very messy garden, and She loves it. She sets him to work with Her, cleaning up a spot. They pull up bits, getting the ground ready for a new planting.

When they're finished, She thanks him.

"I didn't do that much, really," he said apologetically. "I mean, look at this mess." His gaze moved over the garden that surrounded them.

"But it really is beautiful, and full of you, Sarayu. Even though it seems like a lot of work still needs to be done, I feel strangely at home and comfortable here." . . .

*Sarayu stepped toward him. . . . "And well you should, Mackenzie, because this garden is your soul. This mess is you! Together, you and I, we have been working with a purpose in your heart. And it is wild and beautiful and perfectly in process. To you it seems like a mess, but I see a perfect pattern emerging and growing and alive. . . ."*⁷

God's "cleaning us up" grace! Because you are wild, and messy, and beautiful, God is making you holy.

Amazing Grace!

⁷ William Paul Young, The Shack (Newbury Park, CA: Windblown Media, 2007), 140.