

“GIVE GRACE”  
Remove The Obstacles Series #5  
Acts 14      March 24, 2021

I want to start tonight with an amazing account.

“It was five days before Christmas when a stranger approached ten-year-old Christopher Carrier, claiming to be a friend of his father. "I want to buy him a gift, and I need your help," the stranger said. Eager to do something good for his dad, Chris climbed aboard a motor home parked up the street.

“The driver took Chris to a remote field, claiming to be lost, and asked Chris to look at a map. Suddenly Chris felt a sharp pain in his back. The stranger had stabbed him with an ice pick. The man drove the wounded boy down a dirt road, shot him in the left temple, and left him for dead in the alligator-infested Florida Everglades.

“Chris lay unconscious for six days until a driver found him. Chris miraculously survived his injuries, though he was blind in his left eye. Because he was unable to identify his attacker, police could not make an arrest. For a long time young Chris remained frightened, despite police protection. Finally at an invitation given after a church hayride, Chris trusted Jesus Christ as his Savior. He recalls, "I was overwhelmed with emotion . . . because I knew I had never really accepted and personally met the Savior." This turning point in Chris's life came three years after the attack. At age 15 Chris shared his story for the first time. He eventually decided to pursue full-time ministry, helping others find the peace he had discovered in Christ.

“In 1996 a detective told Chris over the phone that a man had confessed to the crime that had cost him his left eye. The man's name was David McAllister. Chris made plans to visit the feeble and now blind man, living in a nursing home. The strong young man Chris remembered was now a broken, humbled 77-year-old.

“Chris learned from the detective some of the background of what had happened years ago. McAllister had been hired by Chris's father to work as a nurse for an ailing uncle. Chris's dad had caught McAllister drinking on the job and had fired him. The senseless attack on Chris had been

motivated by revenge.

“As Chris now talked to the old man, at first McAllister denied knowing anything about the kidnapping. As Chris revealed more about himself, the old man softened and eventually apologized. Chris said, ‘I told him, “What you meant for evil, God has turned into a wonderful blessing.”’ Chris told his attacker how God had allowed his wounds to become open doors to share the good news of Christ.

“Chris went home and told his wife and kids about meeting the man who had tried to kill him. The entire family began almost daily visits to McAllister's nursing home. During one Sunday afternoon visit, Chris popped the most important question he had yet asked McAllister: ‘Do you want to know the Lord?’ McAllister said yes. Both men basked in forgiveness as McAllister gave his heart to Christ. A few days later McAllister died—peacefully—in his sleep.

“Chris Carrier says it’s not a story of regret, but of redemption. ‘I saw the Lord give that man back his life, and so much more,’ Chris said. ‘I can't wait to see him again someday—in heaven.’”<sup>1</sup>

What an account of grace! While David McAllister deserved Chris Carrier’s anger and hatred, Chris gave David forgiveness and love. That’s what grace is, giving something that a person does not deserve. While mercy is not getting what we deserve, grace is being given something we don’t deserve. To receive forgiveness for the sins we have committed, to receive love from those who have been the victims of violence and injustice, is overwhelming. It is exactly what God has done for us, and it is precisely what God desires that we do for others so that they might turn from their wicked ways and find the Lord God in their life, too.

You see, while we have all sorts of things happen to us, human nature calls us to be angry about what happened, to let that anger grow into bitterness that boils within us. And that bitterness causes us to want to get revenge and give that person exactly what they gave to us. Right? When we are hurt, or scorned, or offended, or abused, we want to retaliate and make sure that that person gets exactly what they’ve been giving out so that they will know what it feels like when it happens to them. Sad thing is,

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<sup>1</sup> (PreachingToday.com, *Perfect Illustrations*, [Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, 2002] pg. 115-116)

though, that most times the people who are acting badly are ones who, themselves, have already experienced hurt, or scorn, or offense or abuse, and they are living their life as a result of what they have experienced. To return the same kind of treatment will not help the situation, but only exacerbate it and the whole situation spirals out of control. Much like David McAllister retaliating against Chris Carrier's dad by hurting Chris, human nature tells us to get even, if not get ahead.

But God calls us to forgive, to give grace in place of revenge so that His work might be done in surprising ways. Let's look at tonight's Scripture lesson, Acts 14. Follow along and listen to how Paul and Barnabas do not retaliate with anger or revenge, but continue to show love to those who showed them disrespect and anger and violence. (READ Acts 14)

Despite all the stuff that the Jews and Gentiles were doing to Paul and Barnabas, they kept sharing the love of Jesus Christ with the people of Iconium, Lystra, Derbe, Antioch and Pisidia. They kept telling others about what God has done for all people if they will believe in Jesus Christ. They freely shared the Salvation of the Lord God Almighty, and touched the lives of so many by working miracles among them and encouraging them to find faith in Jesus. We have no record of there being any anger, or resentment, or hostility from the disciples toward the people. They knew that the people were just responding according to their human nature, so the disciples lived in such a way as to demonstrate a difference before the people so that they could see the freedom they could have when they let Jesus be the Lord and Savior of their lives.

The disciples had every right to be angry with the ones who plotted against them and even tried to kill them. But rather than resort back into the human nature, the disciples chose to live in God's grace and to freely forgive and love even the ones who could be counted as enemies. Paul and Barnabas decided to love the people rather than hate them. They decided to respond to the treatment they were receiving with the love of God toward the others. They "took a licking and kept on ticking," to quote an old Timex commercial. No matter what the Jews and Gentiles threw at them or did to them, Paul and Barnabas and the others chose to love rather than to hold any resentments against their persecutors.

So if Paul and Barnabas could do that back then, how can we do that today? Certainly there are many things coming against us that could easily cause us to hate another person. Surely there are people in our lives who have done us wrong and want to do their best to destroy us. Each one of us can give accounts of those who have wronged us, who have cheated us, who have done their best to wipe us out. If I were to invite personal examples from you, we'd be here the rest of the week! But how are we doing on giving grace to those same people?

We have Jesus Christ in our lives! We have claimed the mercy and grace of God in our own lives and we have been called to live that same mercy and grace of God before those around us, so that they can see the difference Jesus makes in us. But how do we do that? We fight against human nature every day, but sadly the only Christian message being received by many on the outside of the church is that of condemnation, criticism, ridicule and even revenge. If we are going to be called a follower of Jesus Christ, if we are going to call ourselves "little Christs," (for that is what Christian means), then we need to begin to live like Jesus and put grace into our lives and live according to His standards, following His commands and His example. Then when others persecute us for following His Will and His Ways, we are to love them like Paul and Barnabas loved the people of Pisidia and Lycaonia after they were so harshly treated.

You see, we are told that Paul and Barnabas "*strengthened the believers and encouraged them to remain true to the faith. 'We must pass through many troubles to enter the Kingdom of God,' they taught*" (Acts 14:22). Even though they received harsh treatment, they freely shared the love of Jesus Christ with the people so that they could experience something different. The people saw their witness, they experienced their forgiveness and grace, and the people turned to Jesus. The people were given grace, and it changed their lives.

It didn't matter to Paul and Barnabas what the people looked like. It didn't matter what race they belonged to. It didn't matter what language they spoke. The disciples treated each person with love, knowing that everyone had the same basic need – to have their sins forgiven and to live in faith in the

Lord Jesus Christ. No differences in appearance or culture mattered. Jesus died for all those who will claim Him as their Savior for the forgiveness of their sins, giving them eternal life through Him.

In our world today we do not see that kind of grace very often. Instead we hear of murders based upon race because this pandemic has been identified as starting in a particular country. Instead of showing love to one another, there is hatred, anger, accusation, injustice and resentment taking place. So where is the world going to see what grace looks like? We have to be the ones to demonstrate it so that they can see the difference. But we cannot live gracefully when we're angry at another. We cannot give grace to another as long as we have grudges against them. Forgiveness has to start with us, so that as we love the other as God loves us, we can then develop a relationship with them and hopefully bring them to a point where they can receive Jesus as their Lord and Savior. Only then can a true change take place.

Let me close with just one more illustration. “The most jarring TV commercial of 1999 didn't say a word. It simply shows a series of people who had one thing in common—a nasty injury or scar. There's a cowboy with a huge scar around his eye, and something wrong with the eye itself; a fellow with a bulbous cauliflower ear; another with horribly callused feet. There's no explanation at all, simply the Nike swoosh and ‘Just Do It.’

“The ad has been analyzed and criticized widely as being incomprehensible and extreme. But the key to the controversial commercial lies in the background music. Joe Cocker sings, ‘You are so beautiful . . . to me.’

“To these athletes—the wrestler with the cauliflower ear, the surfer with a shark bite, the bull rider blind in one eye—their injuries are beauty marks. And to their fans, these athletes are beautiful because of their scars. ‘Beauty is in the eye of the beholder,’ says Mike Folino, the ad's creator.

“God's grace is just as jarring and controversial. Our beauty is found not in us, but in Him. He looks down at us—injured, blind, and scarred—and sings, ‘You are so beautiful . . . to me.’”<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> (PreachingToday.com, *Perfect Illustrations*, [Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, 2002] pg. 112-113)

So let's start singing that to those around us, even though they might have hurt us, or scarred us, or abused us, because if they are beautiful to God, they need to be beautiful to us, too.

Let's pray. Father, You know how hard it is for us to forgive others for what they have done to us. You know how hard grace can be. But You modeled grace on each one of us as we have claimed Jesus Christ as our Savior, and found what we don't deserve – Your forgiveness and love. Help us to be willing to love others like You love us. Help us to show grace to others like You showed grace to us. In this season of Lent, help us to be willing to give grace to one another so that everyone can experience Your grace to us. This we pray in Jesus' Name. AMEN.