

GRACE

Ed O'Connor

What do you think of when you hear the word "grace"? Something about Jesus? Something about what God gives us? But how can we give grace? How can we do grace? Let me tell you a true story¹ to explain what I mean.

Patricia was a mother of a well-off English family living in Fiji in the 1950s. They had servants which was customary in that context. Patricia discovered that one servant had been stealing. Her first reaction was to sack her but Patricia had recently become a Christian and she wanted to think through what believing in God's grace meant to her life. She prayed about it and reasoned that her servant had stolen because she was poor and needed the money to feed her family. Patricia decided that God would not want her to sack her servant but to give her a raise which was what she did.

The servant was astounded and became a devoted household maid. Patricia's act of grace was an overflow of the grace she had received from God and it was life changing for her servant. Later Patricia led her to faith in Jesus Christ.

Grace is getting what we don't deserve. We deserve death and God's judgement but, because of Jesus' life, death and resurrection we get what we don't deserve - life, the Holy Spirit, fellowship with God, church, gifts . . . think of all the other things God gives us. But it doesn't stop there. Like Patricia, we can give grace as it overflows from the grace we have received from God. We can do grace/give grace, and it may be life changing for the people who receive it.

You can treat people well at home, at work, at church or at whatever sport you get up to. These are good things to do but it's not grace. It's being nice. It's doing what non-Christians and Christians alike do. Grace is giving someone what they don't deserve and you don't see non-Christians doing that very often. Unfortunately, you don't see Christians doing that much either. I found it hard to even think of another story of grace. Why are our acts of grace so rare?

We were looking at Jeremiah in a Bible study group and we saw how God warned his people of impending judgement. This led to the idea of God's grace. I suggested we could be like God in showing mercy and grace. Someone asked me for an example so I told them Patricia's story. One reaction, half-joking, was that maybe the other servants stole something in the hope that they too would get a raise. I think this is one of two reasons we don't show grace to other people: we are afraid they will take advantage of us. If we give something for nothing we are afraid they will want more, or other people will want something from us too. We are not very generous are we? It's a good thing God didn't feel this way when he gave us Jesus.

The other reason is that our churches don't teach it. We hear a lot about sin and God's grace but we are not taught about human beings giving grace to other human beings. We don't see the minister leading by example and doing grace. We don't hear of many examples of ordinary people doing grace in their everyday lives. Imagine if the major emphasis at church changed from sin to showing grace to people. How would that affect the community we live with? We may see a lot more lives changed and a lot less guilt trips.

1. Used by permission.