LIVING THE OBEDIENT & SURRENDERED LIFE

The Other Side of the Coin: The Grace of Receiving

Keep in mind, a gift is not given because you deserve it. It may not even be given because you want it. It is given because the giver wants to express their love and/or appreciation to you. Our challenge is, will we gratefully and graciously receive it?

For many, the grace of receiving can prove to be even more difficult to learn than the grace of giving. In fact, it seems that those who have developed their grace of giving often struggle the most with demonstrating the grace of receiving. In other words, the more gracious the giver, the less gracious the receiver. Interesting dichotomy, isn't it? Because of this, we can safely conclude that the grace required for giving is not the same as the grace required for receiving.

Have you ever tried to give someone something only to have the person flatly refuse to accept your gift? ("I just can't accept this.") Or have you had someone insist that if they do accept your kindness, they will be paying you back? ("Okay, you can buy my ticket this time, but I am buying yours the next time!") On the contrary, have you had them act as if they really didn't want or appreciate what you were giving them? ("You really didn't need to do this!")

Have you experienced any of these responses to your giving? Even more telling, have you ever expressed any of these graceless responses to someone trying to give you something? It's likely most of us would have to say at one time or another, "Yes, that has been me." Why do we respond this way when we are put in the position of the receiver? There seem to be three causes for why we can find ourselves acting as graceless receivers.

Refusing to Exercise the Grace of Receiving Can Express a Subtle Form of Pride

In John 13:8, Jesus is washing the disciples' feet. When He comes to Peter, Peter responds with a stern refusal, *Never shall You wash my feet!* (NASB). In his refusal to allow Jesus to wash his feet, he expresses a very subtle form of false humility, which is simply pride in disguise. He was unwilling to admit that he needed to have Jesus wash his feet.

Likewise, when we refuse to accept a gift, regardless of how modest or extravagant it may be, we may be refusing to acknowledge that we have a need that someone else is attempting to meet. We often subtly communicate, "I don't need that from you and I won't accept it." I have always been impressed by this comment from Pope John Paul II. He observed, "Nobody is so poor that he has nothing to give, and nobody is so rich that he has nothing to receive." When we resist the gifts and kindnesses of others, it can often come from pride that thinks, "I have more than you do. Just keep your gift. You need it more than I do."

A friend once told of the hardest gift he ever received was from a small group of believers living in the bush in Zimbabwe, Africa: "One Sunday, we went to a bush village to preach. At the end of the service, they gave each of us a warm bottle of pop. Someone had walked 10 miles one

way to the nearby town to buy them for us. Everything within me wanted to refuse their gift. They had so little and I had so much. But I knew I needed to show the grace of *receiving* in order for them to experience the grace and joy of *giving*."

Another subtle form of pride is thinking that accepting someone's gift might imply that you are inferior to the giver. We don't like being in that position, so we resist and/or refuse the gift. People often say, "Oh, you didn't have to do this." Of course they don't, but that is precisely why they do it, because they wanted to. That is what makes giving so much fun! Have you ever refused to show grace in receiving because of your own pride?

Refusing to Exercise the Grace of Receiving Can Express a Subtle Form of Legalism

Have you ever seen someone refuse to show the grace of receiving at a restaurant with a conversation that ends with, "Well, if you are buying my lunch today, then I am buying your lunch the next time we go out"? Why do we do this? It is really pretty simple. Our refusal to express the grace of receiving is nothing more than a very subtle form of legalism. "I will not accept your gift as a gift; I will reluctantly accept it as a loan as long as you agree to let me pay you back as soon as possible."

Maybe we are driven by Romans 13:8 (NASB) that tells us, *Owe nothing to anyone except to love one another*. Do we feel that if someone shows us an act of kindness that we must now reciprocate to balance the ledger—to pay back the "debt" we owe? When did a gift become a debt that must be repaid? A gift is patently not a loan and to think of it like that is to rob the giver of experiencing the grace of giving with no strings attached and nothing to be repaid.

It could be that many of us fear that if we simply accept a gift for what it really is—a gift—we might be seen as a person who selfishly expects others to do all the giving/spending/buying. We don't want to be perceived as someone who is at the opposite extreme: being all *grace of receiving* and no *grace of giving*. Consequently, we reduce the gift to being merely a loan and then make our plans on how we will pay it back. How often have you heard someone who just received a gift say, "I don't know how I can ever repay you for this." It is a gift; it is not supposed to be repaid! Just smile broadly and say thank you!

John 3:16 says, *For God so loved the world, that he gave…* It does not say, He loaned. In fact, let me say that in spite of all our legalistic tendencies, the giver does not want to be paid back by you. To feel like you must do so robs you of the joy and grace of receiving and him the joy and grace of giving. Will you accept a gift with no repayment plan?

Refusing to Exercise the Grace of Receiving Can Express a Subtle Form of Ingratitude

Have you ever given a gift to someone or done some act of kindness, only to see them so downplay it that you can only conclude that they must not have really appreciated what you did for them? Their lack of enthusiasm upon receiving it communicates that you just launched a

dud! Bad gift…bad timing…bad judgment…bad something. It may be that the problem is not with the gift or the giver. It may be a problem with the receiver.

This perceived ingratitude may actually be a manifestation of guilt. A person may feel guilty about receiving what has been given to her. She may think, "You have less than I do; you can't afford this." Or "There are others who need this much more than I do. It is just not right for anyone to spend this kind of money on me or to do such a nice thing for me." Our guilt can kill our gratitude, and our ingratitude can kill the joy of the giver. One time, a man shared, "After giving a gift to someone, the very next day they turned around and gave the gift to someone else. It seemed to me that they obviously didn't appreciate that gift much!"

Keep in mind, a gift is not given because you deserve it. It may not even be given because you want it. It is given because the giver wants to express their love and/or appreciation to you. Our challenge is whether we will gratefully and graciously receive it.

Think about this. How can God teach us the grace of giving if no one is willing to show the grace of receiving? Acts 20:35 says a person is more blessed by giving. But in order for this to happen, someone must be willing to be blessed by receiving. We dare not conclude from this verse that gracious giving is somehow nobler than gracious receiving. There are two sides of the very same coin.

There is a perfect biblical example of gracious receiving. Do you remember from Mark 14 when Mary came to Jesus and fell at His feet, weeping profusely, drying his feet with her hair? She then broke open a vial and anointed Jesus with perfume that was worth a year's wages. This was a totally extravagant and totally unnecessary gift, no doubt. The disciples even vocally objected to the waste—but not Jesus. He scolded them, *Let her alone; why do you bother her? She has done a good deed to M*e (v. 6). Jesus did not need her gift. He was not hoping for this gift. He didn't feel compelled to pay back the gift. He just expressed the grace of receiving and allowed Mary to experience the joy and grace of giving. This is what gracious receiving should look like.

May we all learn from this example of Jesus how to appropriately express to others the grace of receiving!

STUDY GUIDE QUESTIONS

1. What is your reaction to the message in this lesson?

2. Share a time when you were not a gracious receiver?

3. Share a time when someone you were trying to bless in giving, did not respond as a gracious receiver?

4. How can pride be a way of covering up a need you have in your life that someone is trying to meet?

5. Respond to the quote, "Nobody is so poor that he has nothing to give, and nobody is so rich that he has nothing to receive."

6. How would you have responded if you were the one being offered the bottle of pop?

7. How do you respond in a restaurant when someone offers to pay for your meal?

8. How do you respond when someone in far worse shape than you are offers you a gift of some kind? How might refusing the gift appear to be a sign of ingratitude?

9. Why must we learn to be gracious receivers?

10. What can the response of Jesus to Mary's gift of perfume teach us about gracious receiving?

11. What is going to change in your life going forward because of this lesson? What are you going to start doing differently?