

Grapefruit and Grace

During my pre-Christian teenager years, I liked to throw things—baseballs, footballs and grapefruit. One evening while my parents were away, I invited some friends over to our home. Our house was built on a small plot of land overlooking our neighbor's backyard. For some inexplicable reason, my friends and I started picking grapefruit from our tree and maliciously throwing it at the neighbor's house below. We bombarded their pool, their patio, and even launched grapefruit over their roof and onto the driveway. Then, one of my friends threw a grapefruit that smashed dead center into the sliding glass door. This caused my neighbors to leap from their couch to see what was going on. I scrambled to close the gate hoping not to be seen; but to no avail. Our cover was blown! I was in trouble.

Once my mom heard the story, she demanded that I go to my neighbor's house, apologize, and clean up the mess that my friends and I had made. Upon arriving at my neighbor's home, I was astonished to find that all the grapefruits had already been picked up and placed neatly into two grocery bags and the patio cleaned. Even more amazing, my neighbors said that they were Christians, that they forgave me and that they hoped my parents would not punish me too severely.

For the first time in my life, I began to understand Christian grace. My neighbors reflected Christ that day and taught me a valuable lesson: every sinful act has the potential to be transformed into something higher when God and his people give grace to those who *do not* deserve it. Now, when I am discouraged by my sin, I reflect upon my Savior, who like my neighbors, took my punishment and offered me grace in return.

Monday – God's Faithfulness towards His People

"The Lord proves that he is faithful. He does not make promises lightly. The promises he does make, he keeps." Millard J. Erickson - *Christian Theology*

1. Read Numbers 23:19 and 2 Samuel 7:22-28. Why are the promises of God reliable and unchanging? In what ways do these verses reassure you that God is worthy of our trust?
2. Read Romans 11:1-4, 29. Paul is deeply troubled by Israel's failure to accept Jesus as the Messiah; however, he trusts God to keep his promises toward his people. How does Paul view God's faithfulness towards Israel?
3. What overwhelming obstacles confront Jews today? What modern-day "remnant" has God provided demonstrating that he will overcome these difficulties?

Tuesday – Unearned Grace

"Grace taught my soul to pray, [and] pardoning love to know; 'Twas grace that kept me to this day, [and] will not let me go." Philip Doddridge

1. Read Philippians 3:8-9 and Romans 11:5-6. In what ways have you too tried to earn God's grace and salvation? Why does this approach to God always lead to spiritual frustration?
2. What do you personally find so amazing about God's grace?
3. Read Hebrews 13:9. What does the author mean, it is "good for the heart to be strengthened by grace"?

Wednesday – Reconciling the Nations

"Anyone who thinks of Christ exclusively, not for other people but against them, has not understood the Reconciler of the World." Jürgen Moltmann - *The Way of Jesus Christ*

1. Read Isaiah 49:5-6. According to Isaiah, how is God going to accomplish his purpose of bringing the Gentiles into his family?
2. Read Romans 11:16-21 and Ephesians 2:11-16. As you look at these two passages in tandem, what truth(s) does Paul seem to be driving home?

Digging deeper - Why mustn't ethnocentrism or any form of discrimination play a part in the Christian life? What is it about Jesus' humanity and divinity that makes him so accessible to all peoples? Why is he rightfully the "Savior of the World?"

Thursday – Humility

"Humility does not mean thinking less of yourself than of other people, nor does it mean having a low opinion of your own gifts. It means freedom from thinking about yourself at all." William Temple

1. Read Romans 11:20-25. In what forms does Christian pride or arrogance occur today? Why is Paul against such an attitude?
2. How might an attitude of humility aid the Christian in his or her relationships with unbelievers?
3. Christians are called to be both "humble" (Eph. 4:2) and "bold" (2 Cor. 3:12; 2 Tim. 1:7-8). How do these two, which at first glance seem mutually exclusive, actually complement one another in Christ?

Friday – Transforming Human Disobedience

"Yet if I care to listen, I hear a loud whisper from the Gospel that I did not get what I deserved. I deserved punishment and got forgiveness. I deserved wrath and got love." Philip Yancey - *What's So Amazing About Grace?*

1. Consider Joseph's life, which we find recounted in Genesis 37-50. How did God transform the sinful actions done to Joseph (Gen. 37:26-28) into something higher for him (Gen. 41:41), and for all of Israel (Gen. 50:20-25)?
2. Read Romans 11:7-15, 26-31. How has God used Israel's disobedience? When God's plan is fulfilled, what will happen to Israel?
3. Read Romans 11:11, 30-32. Paul goes to great lengths to encourage Christians not to sin; and yet God always offers grace and mercy for those who do. Why is important to keep both of these concepts in mind when living the Christian life?

For the Weekend: Read Genesis 37-50, the account of Joseph's life. Consider the themes of obedience and disobedience, belief and unbelief. How does God accomplish his purposes through it all?