

## **"The Grace-Shaped Life!"**

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Well, here we are at the beginning of an important journey together. It will be a journey that will take each one of us deeper and deeper into an understanding of God's grace. Max Lucado opens his acknowledgements at the beginning of the book with these words, "*Grace is God's best idea. Of all His wondrous works, grace, in my estimation, is the magnum opus.*"

As friends of God, who've had grace lavished on us through Jesus Christ, let's begin our journey looking at today's theme, asking the question, "*What does a grace-shaped life look like?*" A grace-shaped life has all its actions occur in the context of what God's grace has done for us. It's a focus on God and His love, not what society says our focus should be!

Open your Bibles to Romans 3. A grace-shaped life begins with receiving God's grace through faith. A simple definition of grace is, "*God's unmerited favor.*" An acronym we've used many times, and is on the banner in the old lobby, is G. R. A. C. E. – God's Riches as Christ's Expense! You and I, and the whole world, did nothing to merit God's grace. In fact, we continually go against His Law! Because of sin, everyone needs grace, regardless of the circumstances.

God saw our need, and provided His One and Only Son to come to earth to pay the price for our sin. Jesus suffered and died that we might live. Look at verses 23-24, "*for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus.*" God's sending of Jesus is an example of pure grace!

Open your Bibles to Luke 15. Jesus gave an example of this kind of love and grace when He told the Parable of the Prodigal Son, and He told about the father's reaction at his son's return. Look at verses 20-24, "*And he arose and came to his father. But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and felt compassion, and ran and embraced him and kissed him. And the son said to him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son.' But the father said to his servants, 'Bring quickly the best robe, and put it on him, and put a ring on his hand, and shoes on his feet. And bring the fattened calf and kill it, and let us eat and celebrate. For this my son was dead, and is alive again; he was lost, and is found.'*" Grace changes people!

But please know, a wimpy grace doesn't change you! Have you settled for a "Goldfish grace"? It sits on a shelf and looks pretty, but it doesn't do anything! It's so easy to hide behind Church membership and church attendance. We see Church as a safe place and our comfort zone. Sometimes we even feel being here is all God expects of us.

But that's not what God's called us to do! The world needs to hear about Jesus Christ and God's grace! When we do that, God's grace does something—it changes hearts and lives! Max Lucado says, "*Our God is in the business of changing hearts!*"

God is a heart surgeon. He knows our situation. He knows our heart. He looks at our heart and knows what's needed in our lives to have us on the right path of faith. He said in Ezekiel 11:19, "*And I will give them one heart, and a new spirit I will put within them. I will remove the heart of stone from their flesh and give them a heart of flesh.*"

One of the best examples of this from Scripture was the Apostle Paul. Paul spent his time and energy rounding up followers of Jesus and taking them to Jerusalem for trial before the Jewish leaders. Christians feared to hear he was coming to their town! That was until he was traveling to Damascus and God spoke to Him and called him into sharing Jesus Christ!

Open your Bibles to Galatians 2. God changed Paul's heart and Paul saw what God had done and how his life was changed because of Jesus Christ. Look at verse 20, "*I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.*"

In that verse there's one phrase I don't want you to miss! "*I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me.*" We talk many times how God is "with" us or "for" us, but Paul's point here is that Christ lives IN us! Christ is your total being! Luther said about this verse, "*By faith, you are so cemented to Christ, that He and you are as one person!*" When grace happens, Christ enters!

That means that when people see and listen to you, they shouldn't see or hear you, they should see and hear Jesus Christ! That's what God has called you to do, to be His witness and representative to the world around you. You carry the message the world needs to hear—Jesus came to suffer, die, and rise for all!

Colossians 1:27 continues this thought, "*To them God chose to make known how great among the Gentiles are the riches of the glory of this mystery, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory.*" A commentator said this about this verse, "*The mystery is not only about Christ coming to this world, but also about Christ coming personally to each individual. Through Word and Sacrament, Christ is IN you!*"

So, is your life shaped by grace? What evidence do you see in your life of a changed heart? This shaping and changing doesn't happen because of something you do. It has all to do with what Christ has done IN you! God's the actor, you're just the recipient of His grace!

Reflect on these words from Max Lucado: "*We are Jesus Christ's; we belong to Him. But even more, we are increasingly Him! Rather than tell you to change, He creates the change! His dream isn't just to get you into heaven but to get heaven into you!*"

*What a difference this makes! Can't forgive your enemy? Can't face tomorrow? Can't forgive your past? Christ can, and He is on the move, aggressively budging you from graceless to grace-shaped living! Grace is everything Jesus!"*