

GRACE GREASE

Wes Jackson, founder of the Land Institute, would end his speeches with, "I believe in what I said and that it is true, butI'm prepared to take it all back if I offended you."

There is grace in those closing words. It is a message of Grace.

The key part is about being offended.

Sometimes the choice of wording is too acerbic / caustic,..... and... sometimes the listener just isn't able, ready... or capable.... *yet*.... to receive the message. Either reason will cause a breakdown in communication, ... a backlash..... and a possible disruption in the relationship.

Relationships can be very tricky,..... very tricky indeed.

Presenting a controversial message or presenting a new way / new idea can be counterproductive if it isn't packaged appropriately or the person isn't ready to embrace it, yet.

I have a friend from seminary who is also a Facebook friend. He is a stereotypical Texan. We've done some entertaining bantering.

Yesterday, he posted that while he was in Lubbock, TX, he bought a new pistol, and he gave all the details about it. He was really excited about the gun.

I typed, deleted, typed and deleted a number of comments, but ended up not commenting at all. We are more than 3,000 miles apart..... on that issue. There was no point in printing my opinion about handguns.

His excitement about his purchase was not an introduction for productive conversation, and besides.... the whole truth includes: I don't like handguns because they hurt people,..... and I didn't want to hurt him ... or our relationship.

It is very challenging: presenting one's own opinion on a controversywithout offending, especially if passion is involved.

Nevertheless,....Sometimes we must be bold and profound,..... and sometimes we must be patient and diplomatically prudent.

Even so, truth is NOT just the facts..... **A big part of truth includes the aspect of relationship.**

It is very sad and painful when relationships are broken.

Our Relationships are very, very precious because we are in them / connected..... and any break or fracture.... hurts wholeness.... including our own wholeness. All involved become less when there is brokenness.

Our relationships include: with creation, to the world, our country, our community, with our friends and relatives, with our church and God.

We are just a part of the whole..... and much of that whole,.... it seems struggles to be healed / complete.

Our Relationships come in different flavours

We wrestle with creation. We thought we had nature subdued, but now she's fighting back.

We are at times fearful or indifferent towards our world connections. Our national relationship goes up and down like the flag on Parliament hill, and our community relationship is often an effort to be ignored.

And, our critical / close relationships.... are not always the best, either.

I think we have a very good and loving church,.... and yes we could do better.

We need to have more potlucks;... we are having a picnic next Sunday!!

I will say that even though more people have joined us than left, over the past few years, it still makes me very sad when someone decides to leave.

The separation causes.... brokenness – with pain and sorrow.

Most of the departures have been over doctrinal issues / theology, and that is very unfortunate.....

because our bonds / our connections are MUCH more than merely sharing the same ideology. We are family.

And, we need to be reminded of **those** bonds and nurture those tethers that connect us in many precious ways.

Yet, sometimes there are disagreements. Something happens. Maybe it was words – something was poorly stated or not received well. Or maybe it was selfishness or ...whatever..... and the relationship breaks down – ceases to grow – it freezes, and that broken state is very painful.

All parties lose out, and behaviour can get weird when there is brokenness.

North Korea doesn't know how to act appropriately.

We don't know how to regard the Taliban or the leaders in Iran.

We label our divisions in our own country.

Churches pull out of fellowship over the current critical, must not budge an inch, hot topic that will be completely fade within 10-20 years issue.

And,...Marriages lock up and fall asunder. Family or friends cease to exchange kind words.....

And, it all hurts us all. It hurts.

Our text is Paul addresses the budding first century church in Corinth. The Corinth church is struggling – there is brokenness – within the church and with Paul,..... They are STUCK,... and they are having difficulty figuring out how to get unstuck / how to heal the relationship.

I'm going to lift out things in the passages, so follow along with the text, if you wish.

Chapter six opens with Paul reminding them that - “Hey” we are working together!.....right? Yes,..... we must keep working together – together with GOD. This is NOT just about us and our own agendas and issues. This church stuff is about God!!!!

Then Paul identifies the problem ... when he says,

“...do Not accept the Grace of God in vain.”

I don't believe Grace is Grace unless it IS Received.

Grace is life changing, and when we receive Grace we want to do / live Grace. WE want to give and be gracious.

Here Paul is gently saying receive the grace, and when you do, then you will be the grace.

Okay, we mention grace a lot in church, and we are left assuming we know what it is.

Books are written about the topic, but I'll attempt, in a couple paragraphs, to remind us what Grace is.

Grace is the glue that holds us in healthy fellowship, and Grace is the grease that frees us when we are locked up in torment and brokenness.

Grace is more than forgiveness. Grace is more than love. Grace is both love and forgiveness in action and more.

Grace is a life giving outward flow of love, with the feel of an invitation.

Grace is accepting someone without conditions and bias, and it includes the passion to give with the goal of uniting.

Grace is healing compassion.

Grace is God's love in Action, and Grace is the movement / the divine creative energy that seeks to bring wholeness.

Also, Grace is truth..... because there are no lies and deception in wholeness.

That's a quick overview of grace.

Oh, and when touched by Grace / when Grace is received,.... it will change your life..... and inspire each of us to do Grace.

Paul continues in chapter 6 by saying NOW is an acceptable time to change / to be saved!

We know that salvation is a process. Paul even said that "we are being saved." However, we must not forget that every process has a beginning. At some point we started on this journey of healing.

In this passage, Paul is gently prompting the Corinthians to consider "opening up.... to receive Grace."

The next few verses are about Paul humbly presenting his compassion and passion. He is pouring out his own soul to them.

In verse 11, he states that he and his followers have been FRANK – honest and direct. He is not trying to deceive. It is all out on the table / out in the open.

Relationships NEED open and honest confession. Grace thrives in truth. There is no sugar coating the medicine. There is full exposure,... and.... each of us know how risky it is to be vulnerable,..... because we may look bador, even worse, we can be rejected.

BUT,..... healing and restoration needs honesty, and NOT more lies or myths. Healthy relationships Need honesty – frank, direct honesty.

I recall one heated argument with Jessica, my eldest daughter, when she was a teenager. I was trying to convince her that I knew better. She was wanting to go to a late night party. The debate was not going well, and in frustration, I got lucky..... and said in complete humble honesty, "I've never been a parent before; this is all new to me. However, you've never been 16 before, BUT I have. Maybe I can share with you what I've learned along the way."

My humble, honest confession invited her to respond frankly and from the heart. We both learned and grew from that exchange.

Grace prompts us to risk being vulnerable.

Paul goes on to confess that his heart is wide open – he is being very vulnerable –self exposing..... and he is willing to receive their feedback, too. And, he implores them to be open, too.

He confesses his passions and pain, and invites them to respond..... at a heart level.

This theme / invitation continues in the next chapter.

Verse 2 is more of the same pleadings: asking them to make room in their hearts. He tries to convince them that he is safe, and THEN... ..he says some gracious things.

Grace can lubricate the frozen lock on a person's heart.

Paul tells them that he loves them – they are in his heart.
And, he says he is Proud of them.

"I'm Proud of you." – that is a powerful, heartfelt, gracious declaration.

He gives to them and a gracious gift invites a response.

Again in chapter 8, verse 7, Paul tell them that he loves them and wants what is best for them.

*I'm not sure why, but the translators took some liberties in verses 7 and 9, but "...generous undertaking" is actually "generous grace" in the original Greek. And, in verse 9, "...the generous ACT" is really "generous **grace**."*

It is about GRACE.

And, Paul wants them to excel in what truly matter / what brings healing and wholeness – GRACE.

In the following verses, he challenges them a bit, by questioning whether they really are living in Grace.

He reminds them that Grace is a full circle – we receive –we give – we receive, and so on. It is a process and a way of living – God's way.

This is clearly stated in verses 14 and 15 with the explanation of Movement of resources / abundance.

There is a pouring out beyond levelling. Paul suggests a pouring out until the other has more, so that we are in a condition to receive in return.

There is a senses of constant movement..... of humbly giving and receiving.

This process presents the image of a healthy lake, water system.

A body of water that only receives / that hoards the water quickly becomes stagnant, and eventually undrinkably salty.

Even a balancing system will render the same results, over time.

However, a Lake that has water flowing out, also pulls fresh water in, and the cycle continues. The emptying is also the filling.

Remember that:

When we feel the most insecure and the neediest, we tend to hoard / to withdraw and protect ourselves – to HOLD on to what we have.

Yet actually, to be filled / to be refilled, we must **graciously** give / release / empty ourselves.

Of course, our reptilian brain / our base instincts will scream at us.... what if there's no water to refill the lake / what if no one feeds you when you grow hungry / what if NO one loves you in return?

I believe Grace comes from God, and Paul says the same.

God is in the cycle of healing and wholeness.... God is doing Grace. We know this,... but do we believe it, too?

Today's passages are about fixing broken relationships. They are about Salvation – a return to wholeness.

We could call it returning to Eden or ...returning to God.... or merely the journey to healing and wholeness.

Regardless what we call it, the process is about healing broken relationships by DOING GRACE.

Most of us can sense the emptiness and pain in the world / in our lives.... because we are part of it all.

Only the most insulated, as the Bible calls them, “possessing a harden heart” are numb.

We are in creation, and we are part of the brokenness.

Like Paul, there are those who are speaking out for healing. speaking out about how our environment is being exploited and destroyed.... for financial gain. Those defenders of nature seek to bring wholeness to creation, yet grace must be in the message, too.

Our society must understand Grace – to reduce crime and to heal the ills that afflict us.

As the Bible constantly challenges us, we must be in the process of turning things upside down – of doing Jubilee / of giving away, and not defending the status quo. The rich must be poor, so that the poor can be rich, so that the rich can be poor.... the cycle never ends.

As a global community, we must do more than paint the Golden Rule on a building in New York. Grace will change a soldier's heart, and... We must love our enemies, and act like we really do, by....doing grace.

What is it that North Korea really needs?

What are the people in Afghanistan crying for.... more guns?

To be on the journey to wholeness and healing,....Our lives must be filled with constant Grace questions.

What does my neighbour need?

The peculiar person down the street, who never speaks, what is her pain?

How can I give Grace to someone in my church.

How can I open my heart wider to receive.....and to give?

What is God calling me to do..... and to let go of.... and to accept?

Sometimes, we affluent self-sufficient types have more trouble receiving than giving.....

Either way, the issue is: a closed heart will impede the flow of grace.

And finally, we must be reminded that life is more than just about ourselves.

A healed relationship may not result in what WE want to happen.

Maybe a certain two people just should not live together; however,... they can still nurture respect, honesty, justice, peace and love in their journey to wholeness.... whatever that wholeness looks like.

God's way ... the way of Grace is much bigger than our own agenda.

Sometimes..... we forget. We get wrapped up in our own affairs / our own frantic busyness that we neglect what matters most – our relationships. And, then we wonder why we are so down / why we have so much pain and feel so empty.

Let us not forget that:

WE are a part of God's creation....

We are citizens of the world and active participants in our nation and community.

We are members of our church, and..... we have trusted friends and loved ones.

AND,....let us not forget God's Grace to us..... and to pass it on.

Healing can begin now,.... and **that** Grace will change the world.

I believe in what I said and that it is true, butI'm prepared to take it all back if I offended you.