

## GREETING [PERSONAL]

Thank Jonathan for his introduction and for reading today's Scripture passage.

## [PRAY]

## INTRODUCTION TO TOPIC [SLIDE #1]

In his book, "What's So AMAZING About GRACE", author Philip Yancey writes:

During a British conference on comparative religions, experts from around the world debated, what, if any, belief was unique to the Christian faith. They began eliminating possibilities. **Incarnation**? Other religions had different versions of gods appearing in human form. **Resurrection**? Again, other religions had accounts of returns from death. The debate went on for some time until C.S. Lewis wandered into the room. "What's the rumpus about?" he asked, and heard in reply that his colleagues were discussing Christianity's unique contribution among world religions. Lewis responded, "Oh, that's easy. **It's grace.**"

**"GRACE"** → The **free** and **unmerited** favor of God! [TOTALLY UNEARNED, TOTALLY UNDESERVED!!]

While all other world religions offer ways in which to **earn** GOD's approval, Christianity teaches that God's love is **unconditional**.

**GRACE** is not dependent upon human effort! In fact, **GRACE** does not depend on what we do for GOD at all, but rather on what GOD has done for us.

Our sins, which separate us from GOD, can be **FORGIVEN** only because the **GIVER** of **GRACE** himself has paid our debt on the **cross**!

**GRACE...**      **FORGIVENESS...**

For the next few minutes I want us to imagine "**GRACE & FORGIVENESS**" as having **two sides**.

There is the **SIDE** and **PERSPECTIVE** of the **GIVER** and there is the **SIDE** and **PERSPECTIVE** of the **RECEIVER**.

## TODAY'S TEXT (Gen 50:15-21)

To get started, let's review today's text again, this time paying attention to who **GIVES GRACE** and who **RECEIVES GRACE** in this short, but **dramatic** exchange we find in **Genesis 50**.

After living in Egypt for **17yrs** (47:28), JACOB has now died (Gen 49:29-33) and after a period of **great mourning**, which lasted some **70 days**, (Gen 50:1-5), JOSEPH and his BROTHERS travel to Canaan to bury their father in the family tomb.

Now let's read verses 15-19 again:

***15** When Joseph's brothers saw that their father was dead, they said, "What if Joseph holds a grudge against us and pays us back for all **the wrongs we did** to him?" **16** So they sent word to Joseph, saying, "Your father left these instructions before he died: **17** 'This is what you are to say to Joseph: I ask you to forgive your brothers the **sins and the wrongs they committed in treating you so badly.**' Now please **forgive the sins** of the servants of the God of your father."*

*When their message came to him, **Joseph wept. 18** His brothers then came and threw themselves down before him. "We are your slaves," they said.*

Well did you **see** them, the **GIVER & RECEIVERS**?

Actually it's not too difficult to identify the **GIVER & RECEIVERS** of **GRACE** in this passage, as all of us have had opportunities to **GIVE GRACE** and the need to **RECEIVE** it ourselves.

You see we are ALL sinners in need of **receiving** **GRACE & FORGIVENESS** and we are ALSO sinners called to **give** **GRACE & FORGIVENESS** to other **sinners**.

So for the **remainder of our time today** let's try to look at **GRACE & FORGIVENESS**:

Through the "**eyes**" and perspective of Joseph's **BROTHERs – Sinners in need of GRACE**

Then let's look at **GRACE & FORGIVENESS**:

Through the "**eyes**" and perspective of **JOSEPH – A sinner who gives GRACE to other sinners**

**In the process I want to try to answer two questions [SLIDE #2]:**

- 1.) How can we **RECEIVE** **GRACE & FORGIVENESS** as Joseph's **BROTHERs** did?
- 2.) How can we **GIVE** **GRACE & FORGIVENESS** in the way **JOSEPH** did?

## **RECEIVING GRACE/FORGIVENESS**

Let's begin by looking at **GRACE & FORGIVENESS** through the "**eyes**" of **JOSEPH BROTHERs – sinners in need of GRACE!**

**JOSEPH** told his **BROTHERs** that it was God and not them who sent him to Egypt, but that was over **17yrs ago!** [**Gen 45:4-13**]

After their father died, his **BROTHERs** feared that **JOSEPH** might now seek revenge for the all the wrongs they did to him.

**Imagine** being in their "**shoes**". They might have been thinking thoughts like:

Has he really been sincere? What we did to him is unforgiveable!

Has Joseph just been kind to us only out of respect for our Father?

With Dad now gone, will he turn on us and give us what we deserve?

So his **BROTHERs** send a message to **JOSEPH**, **pleading for his FORGIVENESS (for what they did to him)**. **JOSEPH** responds by **weeping**

After sending the message, they go to **JOESPH** and **throw themselves down** before him in submission to his authority.

They even go as far as referring to themselves as his **SLAVES**, implying that he can do with them as he pleases (remember 37:7; reference 42:6, 43:26,28 and 44:14).

**Remember, in this situation, JOSEPH's BROTHERs are the recipients of GRACE & FORGIVENESS...**

In this short interchange we observe two key characteristics of a **RECEIVER** of **GRACE & FORGIVENESS**.

They are: **RECOGNITION** of sin, followed by **REPENTANCE** due to the sorrow caused by sin.

**1<sup>st</sup>** – There is **RECOGNITION (of sin)**: The first, and arguably the most vital step, in the process of **receiving** GRACE & FORGIVENESS, is the **recognition** or **acknowledgement** of our offense. This is what the Bible refers to as **confessing** our sins.

In this passage JOSEPH's BROTHERS recognize the terrible things they did to JOSEPH, they don't make excuses, but simply **acknowledge** all the wrongs they did to him.

**2<sup>nd</sup>** – There is **REPENTANCE (due to sorrow)**: While not explicitly stated here, it is in Chapter 44, in the exchange between JOSEPH and JUDAH, that we see the depth of **Judah's sorrow, sorrow which ultimately led to his repentance** (44:18-34), as he was willing to trade places with his brother Benjamin and remain in Egypt as a slave (44:33-34).

Referring to his brother Benjamin, we read in (verses 33-34 of) Genesis 44, what Judah was willing to do:

**33** *“Now then, please let your servant remain here as my lord's slave in place of the boy, and let the boy return with his brothers. 34 How can I go back to my father if the boy is not with me? No! Do not let me see the misery that would come on my father.”* [Gen 44:33-34]

Judah was willing to trade his life for Benjamin's life in order to spare his Father the grief that the loss of Benjamin would bring!

This is what the Bible refers to as **“Godly sorrow”** → Sorry which leads to **repentance**, turning-away from sin and turning towards GOD!

### **GODLY SORROW**

In the N.T., Paul tells us that *“Godly sorrow brings repentance that leads to salvation and leaves no regret, but worldly sorrow brings death”* [II Cor. 7:10]

- **Godly sorrow is evidence of a repentant heart!**
- **A heart that is sorrowful because of the brokenness that sin causes!**
- **A heart that is concerned with the effects my sin has on my relationship with God & Others!**

In contrast, **worldly sorrow** is more concerned with self! The consequences of my **sin** as they relate to **ME and ME alone!** (*You know, the kind of sorrow you feel only because you got caught...*)

**ILLUSTRATION:** Ever been stopped for *carelessly* rolling through a stop sign or *knowingly* driving above the speed limit? Maybe you received a ticket, maybe you didn't. [... BTW - I said 'knowingly'...]

OK, I have ☹!

The truth is, in each of these instances there was no **real regret** or **remorse** for breaking the law, but mostly frustration because I got caught doing so (not to mention the financial penalties I might incur☹).

That is an example of **“worldly sorrow”** and in contrast to **“Godly sorrow”**, **“worldly sorrow”** does not lead to repentance.

**CONCLUSION:** We can be confident RECEIVERS of God's **GRACE & FORGIVENESS** because when we **humbly confess** our sin, and with a **repentant** heart, **ask** his forgiveness, God promises to **FORGIVE** us! [Ref I John 1:9]

**ILLUSTRATION (transition):** In the (familiar) story (parable) of the **Prodigal Son**, we see these two key characteristics of a **RECEIVER** of **GRACE & FORGIVENESS: RECOGNITION** of sin, followed by **REPENTANCE**.

You may recall this is the story of a man who had two sons, the younger of whom comes to the father asking for his inheritance. The father grants his request and the younger son subsequently leaves home and squanders all his wealth in 'wild' living.

To make matters even worse, in the story a great famine strikes the land and we read From Luke's Gospel:

*"When he came to his senses, he said, 'How many of my father's hired men have food to spare, and here I am starving to death! I will set out and **go back** to my father and say to him: Father, I **have sinned** against heaven and against you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son; make me like one of your hired men.' So he got up and **went to his father.**" [Luke 15:17-20]*

This short, but familiar story truly illustrates for us the **heart** of a **RECEIVER** of GRACE & FORGIVENESS.

But it also gives us a glimpse into the **heart** of a **GIVER** of GRACE & FORGIVENESS as well....

## GIVING GRACE/FORGIVENESS

So let's now look at GRACE & FORGIVENESS through the "**eyes**" of JOSEPH – a **sinner** called to grant GRACE & FORGIVENESS to other **sinners**. Not just any sinners, but those whose **dastardly deed** did him great personal harm and brought him many years of hardship.

Returning to today's text, we see JOSEPH's amazing response to his BROTHERs plea for FORGIVENESS:

***19** But Joseph said to them, "Don't be afraid. **Am I in the place of God?** **20** You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good to accomplish what is now being done, the saving of many lives. **21** So then, don't be afraid. I will provide for you and your children." And he reassured them and spoke kindly to them.*

Now those of us who have been sinned against (and that would be all of us) may ask, how did JOSEPH do to it? How was he able to FORGIVE his BROTHERs?

While this is one of my favorite stories in the Bible, over the year I have asked myself questions like:

How would I have responded if I were in JOSEPH's sandals?

Would I have shared JOSEPH's perspective on the past if all those things happened to me?

Would I have been able to view the unjust treatment by my BROTHERs the way JOSEPH did?

The Israelites hearing this story for the first time must have surely been challenged by this radical form of FORGIVENESS! **Aren't you?**

Truly I find JOSEPH's response incredibly challenging! And before continuing, I would like to clarify what I mean by challenging!

In full disclosure, before Jonathan asked me if I would be willing to preach a message on this passage, I would have thought of myself as one who is characterized as a giver of GRACE.

But the more time I spent preparing this sermon the more challenged I became in seeing myself in this way.

You see while I can certainly identify myself as a sinner, I find it easier to identify sin in others than in myself.

Let's just say, **GIVING** GRACE & FORGIVENESS is not as natural for me as once thought☺.

So please understand, that while I will attempt to share some thoughts regarding the heart of a **GIVER** of GRACE & FORGIVENESS, I by no means am a master GRACE **GIVER**, and like all of you, I am still a work in progress.

OK, then, let's proceed...

I am persuaded that we **cannot fully comprehend** this radical form of FORGIVENESS until we realize just how much God has FORGIVEN us!

And as we so often see in the Bible, JOSEPH's response reminds us "**GOD's ways are not our ways**"!

#### **APPRECIATING HOW MUCH WE NEED GRACE**

JOSEPH's rhetorical, but profound question, "**Am I in the place of God?**" tells us JOSEPH was trusting the judgment of his BROTHERS to GOD. He did not view this as his job!

Surely the rejection he experienced at the hands of his BROTHERS was real and the emotional scars deep.

But in JOSEPH's response there is a sense of **humility** characteristic of a **GIVER** of GRACE & FORGIVENESS.

JOSEPH **humbly** recognizes GOD's role in this process of GIVING & RECEIVING GRACE and thereby trusts all judgment of his BROTHERS to GOD.

On the subject of FORGIVENESS, Pastor and Author, **Paul Tripp** writes, "Forgiveness is much easier for the person who lives conscious of the reality of how much he also needs to be forgiven. Nobody gives grace better than someone who is convinced he needs it as well" [p. 95]

While his journey has been filled with hardship, we get the sense that JOSEPH understands the GRACE that he has RECEIVED from GOD, so much so that he seems eager to GIVE GRACE & FORGIVENESS to his BROTHERS.

#### **REMEMBERING OUR OWN SIN**

**Paul Tripp**, again writing about FORGIVENESS and the struggle we have in giving it, says,

"Forgiveness requires **remembering**. Why is it that we are so skilled at remembering the other's weakness, failure, and sin and so adept at forgetting our own? Why are we so good at seeing all the ways that another needs to be forgiven but forget how great our need for FORGIVENESS is?"

When we are filled with the grief of our own sin and with gratitude for the amazing FORGIVENESS we have been given, then we will find **joy** in giving to *others* what we have received.

Perhaps a lifestyle of unforgiveness is rooted in the sin of forgetfulness. We forget that there is not a day in our lives that we do not need to be forgiven. We forget that we will never graduate from the need for grace. We forget that we have been loved with a love we could never earn, achieve, or deserve. We forget that GOD never mocks our weakness, never finds joy in throwing our failures in our face. Never threatens to turn his back on us, and never makes us buy our way back into his favor.

When you **remember**, when you carry with you a deep appreciation for the grace that you have been given, you'll have a heart that is ready to forgive." [p. 97]

OK, I understand that you might be thinking, "Sure Chris, that's easy for you and Paul Tripp to say, but you don't know what I have been through".

I will acknowledge that I do not know what it is like to walk in your shoes, and by no means, am I implying that this process is easy.

Unlike the Nike commercial I am not saying, **JUST DO IT!** That would be foolish and imply that being a JOSEPH-like GRACE-GIVER is possible if we merely just try harder.

No, what I am saying is this, that with GOD's help we can become GIVERS of GRACE like JOSEPH!

The Apostle Paul said, "*I can do **everything** through him who gives me strength*" (Phil 4:13)

**Everything** → Including FORGIVING those who sin against us! While in our own strength this may not be possible, I am convinced that **with God all things are possible!**

In fact, experiencing the cost of FORGIVING others serves to help us to better understand how GOD graciously accepts us **even though we don't deserve it!**

In the **Psalms** we read: [SLIDE #3]

*"8 The LORD is compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, abounding in love. 9 He will not always accuse, nor will he harbor his anger forever; 10 he does not treat us as our sins deserve or repay us according to our iniquities. 11 For as high as the heavens are above the earth, so great is his love for those who fear him; 12 as far as the east is from the west, so far has he removed our transgressions from us." (Ps. 103)*

As far as the '**east is from the west**', that is how far God has removed our sins from us! That is FORGIVENESS!

Returning to story of the **Prodigal Son**, we find the TRUTH is that **we are all Prodigals**, we are all in need of receiving GRACE, both from GOD and from those we hurt when we sin.

And in the story, we know that the **Father** represents **GOD** who offers GRACE & FORGIVENESS to his **lost son** with no strings attached.

There was no **Repayment** of the inheritance that he squandered;

There was no **Retribution** for the overt disrespect he showed his Father in demanding his inheritance;

But rather there was **Reconciliation** because of the GRACE offered to him by his **Father**;

This is EXTRAVAGANT GRACE! This is the story of SALVATION!

## WRAP-UP

Yes, we are ALL sinners in need of **receiving** GRACE & FORGIVENESS, **and**, Yes, we are ALSO sinners called to **grant** GRACE & FORGIVENESS to other **sinners**.

In closing I want to share with you a brief story. It is the incredible true story of one who was both a RECEIVER & a GIVER of GRACE (& FORGIVENESS).

It is **the rest of the story** from the movie of **UNBROKEN**.

## CLOSING ILLUSTRATION [UNBROKEN – SLIDE #4, PICTURE]

Louis Zamperini was a well-known and famous US Olympic runner before the war. He was bombardier of a B-24 in the Pacific during the war. After his plane went down, he and the pilot survived over 40 days in a raft only to be picked up by the Japanese.

He spent over two years as a prisoner of war in Japan. 37% of POW's in Japan did not survive and many of the men that did were scarred physically and emotionally for the rest of their lives.

Such was the case of Zamperini until he found Christ. After the war he struggled mightily with flashbacks and nightmares. Plagued by hatred and bitterness he turned to alcohol. His life was a complete mess, his marriage in ruins. **But Christ** took away his nightmares, cured him of alcoholism, and enabled him to love his former enemies, even the guard that mistreated him so badly, Mutsuhiro Watanabe, "the Bird".

A year after coming to Christ, Louie went to Japan. He was a joyful man, his marriage restored, his nightmares and flashbacks gone, his alcoholism overcome. He went to a Tokyo prison where war criminals were serving their sentences.

He hoped to find the Bird, to know for sure if the peace he'd found was resilient. But the Bird wasn't there. Louie was told that the guard had killed himself (but in reality he had been in hiding in order to avoid prison).

Louie was struck with emotion. He was surprised by what he felt. It was not hatred. Not relief. It was compassion. **Louie had found forgiveness.**

Zamperini later returned to Japan in 1998 to carry the Olympic torch. He hoped to visit Watanabe, the Bird, who was no longer in hiding, so he could tell him about Christ, but his overture was refused. This letter was sent instead.

### To Mutsuhiro Watanabe,

As a result of my prisoner of war experience under your unwarranted and unreasonable punishment, my post-war life became a nightmare. It was not so much due to the pain and suffering as it was the tension of stress and humiliation that caused me to hate with a vengeance.

Under your discipline, my rights, not only as a prisoner of war but also as a human being, were stripped from me. It was a struggle to maintain enough dignity and hope to live until the war's end.

The post-war nightmares caused my life to crumble, but thanks to a confrontation with God through the evangelist Billy Graham, I committed my life to Christ. Love has replaced the hate I had for you. Christ said, "Forgive your enemies and pray for them."

As you probably know, I returned to Japan in 1952 and was graciously allowed to address all the Japanese war criminals at Sugamo Prison... I asked then about you, and was told that you probably had committed Hara Kiri, which I was sad to hear. At that moment, like the others, I also forgave you and now would hope that you would also become a Christian.

**Louis Zamperini**

We are ALL sinners in need of **receiving** GRACE & FORGIVENESS, and

We are ALSO sinners called to **give** GRACE & FORGIVENESS to other **sinners**.

[SLIDE #5]