

Lavish Grace Week 4
Grace-Full Witness
By Marcie Gribbin

As a family therapist, I am, every day, stepping into other people's homes where chaos and crisis abound. Each family has their own set of strengths and weaknesses, and it is my job (but mostly theirs!) to restructure the family in a way that promotes healthier relationships. The first time I meet families is arguably the most crucial visit of my time with them. It is important that I show myself as professional, empathetic, knowledgeable, and capable of helping them.

I entered the door for the first time at one family's home and found a clean, calm, even charming environment, and I wondered why on earth I had been asked to come into this particular home. To keep the family focused on the positives of what I was observing, I asked the family to talk about their strengths. The young son piped up with glee, stating that he was *excellent* at cooking hot dogs and mac and cheese. I said, in an attempt to encourage the child, "Oh, that sounds delicious! I bet you are a great cook!" The child smiled and was relatively calm for quite a while. After about two hours with the family, going over treatment plans and boring but necessary paperwork, and getting to know a little about why I had been brought into the home, the son walked over to the door and locked it. He smiled and said, "You're not leaving here until I cook you a hot dog!" The mom sat back and shrugged. I looked at the time and apologized that I had to leave. I stood and headed for the door. The son threw himself on the floor and began to sob, then kicked and screamed, punctuating how horrible I am. I sat back down quietly for several minutes, and listened until the child noticed that I hadn't left. I then said, "You wanted to do something nice for me, and I didn't let you, and that hurt you." The child nodded and slumped and said, "I wanted you to like me and see what I can do."

Now, in that very short amount of time, what lasted maybe five minutes, I learned more about the family, especially the mom and the son and how they behaved and interacted, than I did in the two hours previous, and I knew right then what needed to be worked on within the family structure and relationships. But I was also reminded of something I had briefly forgotten.

Trust is built in the little moments, an inch at a time. It is earned when we take notice of the things that are important to others and treat it with respect. **Respect** is earned when we *show* respect to others. And **grace** can only be lavished on people, when we are **empathetic**, and when we see *all* people as *imago dei*, made in the image of God, and therefore having great value. Even people who do not think the way we think or see the world the way we see the world, are made in His image. And when we fully understand that, it will be second nature to us to lavish grace on others, in the little things, and the not-so-little-things.

If I had stood up, unlocked the door, and walked right out, as I had every right to do, I would have lost my opportunity to build trust with this young heart. And if I had lost his trust in me, my effectiveness in therapy would have been an uphill battle.

Every day, we are given opportunity to lavish grace on others: at work, at home, at school, in the grocery store, on our commutes (especially in traffic!!), at church... just, everywhere. I believe that we lavish grace on people when we genuinely earn their trust by being faithful in those little things. If we long to be a witness to the *power* of Christ, and if we truly long to be His hands and feet, to spread the news of His grace to the hurting, we must earn their trust. We must show respect. We must view others through an empathetic lens, and we must determine in our hearts to view all people as made in God's image, as valuable to Him.

In her book, *Lavish Grace: Poured Out, Poured Through, and Overflowing*, Kathy Howard gives the example of Paul encouraging Timothy to be circumcised before he ministered to others, especially to the Jewish people. Some people may have been angry with Paul, claiming he was being what we could call "legalistic." Some people may have seen the merit in such a drastic measure, and in fact, found it necessary. Paul, however, knew that Timothy would be able to be a more effective witness of the grace of God if he earned the respect of the people to whom he was reaching out. Kathy Howard writes,

"When Paul met him, Timothy was an uncircumcised believer with a Jewish mother. Paul wanted to use him in ministry to the Jews, but Timothy's uncircumcised state was an obstacle. In *The IVP Bible Background Commentary*, author Craig S. Keener explains, "Under Jewish law at least as early as the second century, a person was presumed Jewish if his or her mother were Jewish; but even if that ruling was in effect in Paul's day, Timothy would not have been accepted as fully Jewish, because he had not been circumcised. . . . Paul makes him a full Jew for the sake of his witness to the Jewish community." Timothy's circumcision had no effect on his salvation, but it did open the door of ministry to the Jews so the gospel message could be heard."

Paul was not meaning to tell us that all men should be circumcised, or that this is a means to salvation. He was not trying to give a list of do's and don'ts for getting into heaven, or even for being worthy of preaching the gospel. And, this passage may be confusing, in the opposite sense, when compared to the exhortation to be in the world and not of it (see Romans 12:2).

But, in all circumstances that afford the opportunity to lavish grace or withhold it, we are to be asking ourselves, am I doing this or saying this for my own advantage? Or will my words and deeds help someone have a better understanding of His amazing grace? Whenever you come in contact with others, and are given the opportunity to be a picture of grace to someone, think about this passage:

So, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God. Give no offense to Jews or to Greeks or to the church of God, just as I try to please everyone in

everything I do, not seeking my own advantage, but that of many, that they may be saved (I Corinthians 10:31-33).

Prayer: *Thank You, Lord for lavishing your grace on me. You are faithful to me even when I am not. Forgive me for those times when I have failed to pour out Your grace on others. Help me to build trust in others by being respectful and empathetic to others. Teach me to view others, always, as people who are made in Your image. You are so good! In Jesus' Name, Amen!*

Questions for Reflection:

Have you ever missed out on an opportunity to show grace to someone, even in some small way?

What would you have done differently?

What are some ways to help you build trust with someone who is not a believer?

What are some ways to help you build trust with a family member who is in need of knowing God's grace?

Is there someone, or maybe many people, in your life whom you have difficulty seeing as made in God's image? If so, why?

How are the words TRUST, RESPECT, GRACE, EMPATHY, AND *IMAGO DEI* related?

Read Acts chapter 16, then answer the following questions:

How do you think the people in the cities Paul and Timothy travelled to would have responded had Timothy not been circumcised?

How did Paul and Timothy facilitate trust and respect, and how did they show grace and empathy?





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