

Lesson 18

Grace

Principle 6: Evaluate all my relationships. Offer forgiveness to those who have hurt me and make amends for harm I've done to others, except when to do so would harm them or others.

“Happy are the merciful.” (Matthew 5:6) “Happy are the peacemakers.” (Matthew 5:9)

Step 9: Made direct amends to such people whenever possible, except when to do so would injure them or others.

“Therefore, if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there in front of the altar. First go and be reconciled to your brother; then come and offer your gift.” (Matthew 5:23–24)

Introduction

Tonight, we are going to finish discussing Principle 6. We have talked about how to evaluate all our relationships, offer forgiveness to those who have hurt us, and make amends for the harm that we have done to others, when possible without expecting anything back.

As we grow as Christians and as we grow in our recovery, we want to follow the guidance and directions of Jesus Christ. As we get to know Him better, we want to model His teachings and model His ways. We want to become more like Him. Honestly, if we are going to implement Principle 6 to the best of our ability, we need to learn to model God's grace. But how?

Grace

The key verses of Celebrate Recovery are 2 Corinthians 12:9–10 (NCV): “But he said to me, ‘My grace is enough for you. When you are weak, my power is made perfect in you.’ So I am very happy to brag about my weaknesses. Then Christ's power can live in me. For this reason

I am happy when I have weaknesses, insults, hard times, sufferings, and all kinds of troubles for Christ. Because when I am weak, then I am truly strong.”

Celebrate Recovery is built on and centered in Christ’s grace and love for each of us.

Let’s look at tonight’s acrostic: GRACE.

God’s gift

Received by our faith

Accepted by God’s love

Christ paid the price

Everlasting gift

The *G* in grace is GOD’S gift

Grace is a gift. Grace cannot be bought. It is freely given by God to you and me. When we offer (give) our amends and expect nothing back, that’s a gift from us to those whom we have hurt.

Romans 3:24 (NCV) tells us, “All need to be made right with God by his grace, which is a free gift. They need to be made free from sin through Jesus Christ.”

First Peter 1:13 (NCV) says, “Prepare your minds for service and have self-control. All your hope should be for the gift of grace that will be yours when Jesus Christ is shown to you.”

If my relationship with God was dependent on my being perfect, I would have trouble relating to God most of the time. Thank God that my relationship with Him is built on His grace and love for me. He gives the strength to make the amends and offer the forgiveness that Principle 6 requires.

And how do we receive God's gift of grace? That's the *R* in grace: RECEIVED by our faith.

No matter how hard we may work, we cannot earn our way into heaven. Only by professing our faith in Jesus Christ as our Lord and Savior can we experience His grace and have eternal life.

Ephesians 2:8–9 says, “For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—not by works, so that no one can boast.”

Let me share another verse with you. Philippians 3:9 (TLB) states, “No longer counting on being saved by being good enough or by obeying God's laws, but by trusting Christ to save me; for God's way of making us right with himself depends on faith—counting on Christ alone.”

You and I tend to be more interested in what we do. God is more interested in what we are.

Romans 5:2 says of Jesus, “Through whom we have gained access by faith into this grace in which we now stand. And we rejoice in the hope of the glory of God.”

Just a word of warning: Our walk needs to match our talk. Our beliefs and values are seen by others in our actions. And it is through our faith in Christ that we can find the strength and courage needed for us to take the action Principle 6 requires: making your amends and offering your forgiveness.

The next letter in grace is *A*. We are ACCEPTED by God's love.

God loved you and me while we were still out there sinning. Romans 5:8 says, “God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.”

We can, in turn, love others because God first loved us. We can also forgive others because God first forgave us. Colossians 3:13 (TLB) says, “Be gentle and ready to forgive; never

hold grudges. Remember, the Lord forgave you, so you must forgive others.”

Ephesians 2:5 (NCV) reminds us that “Though we were spiritually dead because of the things we did against God, he gave us new life with Christ. You have been saved by God’s grace.”

I don’t know about you, but I know that I do not deserve God’s love. But the good news is He accepts me in spite of myself! He sees all my failures and loves me anyway. And the same goes for you.

Hebrews 4:16 (NCV) tells us, “Let us, then, feel very sure that we can come before God’s throne where there is grace. There we can receive mercy and grace to help us when we need it.”

Let’s move on to the *C* in grace: Christ paid the price.

Jesus died on the cross so that all our sins, all our wrongs, are forgiven. He paid the price, sacrificed Himself for you and me so that we may be with Him forever.

When we accept Christ’s work on the cross, we are made a new creation. We can then rely on God’s strength and power to enable us to forgive those who have hurt us. We can set aside our selfishness and speak the truth in love. We focus only on our part in making amends or offering our forgiveness.

Ephesians 1:7 (NCV) says, “In Christ we are set free by the blood of his death, and so we have forgiveness of sins. How rich is God’s grace.”

The last letter in grace is *E*: God’s grace is an EVERLASTING gift.

Once you have accepted Jesus Christ as your Savior and Lord, God’s gift of grace is forever.

Let me read a quote from the Big Book of AA, pages 83–84: “Once you have completed Step Nine, you will know a new freedom and a new happiness.... you will comprehend the word

serenity and know peace.... You will suddenly realize that God is doing for you what you could not do for yourself.”

And here’s a quote from the *real* Big Book—the Bible: “And I am sure that God who began the good work within you will keep right on helping you grow in his grace until his task within you is finally finished on that day when Jesus Christ returns” (Philippians 1:6, TLB).

Also, 2 Thessalonians 2:16 (NCV) states, “May our Lord Jesus Christ himself and God our Father encourage you and strengthen you in every good thing you do and say. God loved us, and through his grace he gave us a good hope and encouragement that continues forever.”

My life verse is 1 Peter 2:9–10 (TLB), where God says, “For you have been chosen by God himself—you are priests of the King, you are holy and pure, you are God’s very own—all this so that you may show to others how God called you out of the darkness into his wonderful light. Once you were less than nothing; now you [John Baker] are God’s own. Once you knew very little of God’s kindness; now your very lives have been changed by it.”

I stand before you as a product of God’s grace. Everyone here this evening who has let Christ into his or her life is also a product of God’s grace. As we model this grace, we will be able to do the work that Principle 6 requires.

Let’s close tonight with Colossians 1:6: “All over the world this gospel is bearing fruit and growing, just as it has been doing among you since the day you heard it and understood God’s grace in all its truth.”

Principle 6 Testimony

Hi, I’m Carl, and I’m here because the 12 Steps are an important part of my Christian life.

Before turning my life entirely over to God, my life was unmanageable. I finally hit bottom spiritually and admitted that I couldn't manage my own life. I asked Jesus Christ to manage it for me and be the Lord of my life. I sought God's plan for me, and through prayer, Bible study, and worship, I began to grow spiritually.

I knew that I still had a problem, but I didn't know exactly what, so last year I decided to check out Celebrate Recovery's 12-Step program. I immediately saw three steps that I really didn't want to do. The 4th Step—a searching and fearless moral inventory of myself—required me to look at *all* my hurts, habits, and pain. Couldn't I just leave the past in the past? The 5th Step—confessing the hang-ups, examining *all* of my relationships and resentments, and admitting the exact nature of *all* my wrongs to another person—didn't sound too appealing either. Did I really have to tell them *everything*? But the 9th Step—make direct amends to *all* the people I'd harmed, and offer forgiveness to those who'd hurt me—NO WAY did I want to do that!

I did, however, want to fix my character defects. “It works if you work it,” my new friends in Celebrate Recovery told me, and Pastor John promised me that I would grow spiritually by working the 12 Steps. Because the 12 Steps are based on God's principles from the Bible, I made a commitment to work through the steps.

One of my new friends, a recovering addict, encouraged me to pray and ask Jesus Christ to walk through the 12 Steps with me, but not to pray this unless I was serious about it. My friend gave me good advice; Jesus was with me as I worked through the steps, and we didn't take *any* shortcuts. He is faithful, and He still walks with me daily on my road to recovery.

I want to emphasize that I can't work this program without God's help. I can't do *any* of it without the power of my Higher Power, Jesus Christ.

I did my 4th Step inventory, and God brought to my mind every person I had harmed or who had harmed me, and every resentment. I found myself listing *everybody*—family, friends, ex-girlfriends, coworkers. *Every* significant adult relationship I'd ever had. Looking back, I saw a past littered with wreckage I'd caused, a trail of people I'd damaged and hurt. And I carried resentments and plenty of my own emotional and spiritual scars. *Not* a pretty picture. Now I really dreaded the 9th Step. But as I eagerly finished my 5th Step confession, my sponsor assured me that when I got to the 9th Step, I'd be just as eager to make those amends, and he was right.

In preparing my 8th Step list, I let God guide me through prayer in listing *only* those persons to whom I needed to make amends. That list wasn't as long as my inventory, but it was long enough.

It was obvious to me why I needed forgiveness from most of the people on my list, but I didn't understand why I owed some of them amends. After all, *they'd* hurt me, and even after a thorough inventory, I didn't see that I had hurt them in any way. At this point, I had to reconsider my 3rd and 8th Steps: would I insist on *my* will and not list them, or would I submit to God's will, add their names to my list and be willing to make amends to them, even if I didn't understand why? I added their names to my list.

As I studied and memorized God's Word, I learned that forgiveness and reconciliation are really important. I must ask God for forgiveness, ask and offer forgiveness to others, and seek reconciliation. And it's *always* up to me to make the first move. I will never have to forgive anyone more than God has already forgiven me for my sins. And I will never have to do more than Jesus already did to reconcile me to God by dying on the cross for my sins. Colossians 3:13 tells us, "Bear with each other and forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another. Forgive as the Lord forgave you."

How do I forgive sins from the past? In my heart, I must forgive, and forgive, and forgive, and FORGIVE, whenever the hurt or resentment comes up, until it doesn't come up any more, as many times as it takes.

My sponsor gave me these helpful guidelines on making amends. First, explain the 12-Step program and why I'm making amends, that I'm doing this to get right with God. Second, focus on my part, and don't even mention their part. Third, tell them that I'm truly sorry for hurting them. Fourth, tell them that I'd like "the slate wiped clean." And fifth, don't expect anything from them in return. Explain the program, focus on my part, I'm truly sorry, wipe the slate clean, NO EXPECTATIONS.

Prayer is a very important part of all my steps, especially my amends. I would pray repeatedly for days before making my amends, asking God to help me love that person, and praying for that person. With one person, I started off literally praying through clenched teeth, "GOD, HELP ME TO LOVE HER." I discovered that I cannot sincerely pray for someone *and* continue to hold a resentment against that person. And prayer works.

Most of my amends involved asking for forgiveness. This can be very humbling. Promptly admitting when I'm wrong, has caused me to literally make U-turns to go back and make 10th Step amends. Humbling, yes, but very necessary. For me the choice isn't whether to make amends or not make amends; it's whether to live in a healthy way or self-destruct. It's that simple.

Amends can be offering forgiveness. Several times, after I'd asked for forgiveness for what I'd done, the other person said, "Have I ever done anything to hurt you, because if I have, I'm not aware of it." This really surprised me at first, and I thought, "Are you kidding? You *really* hurt me! How could you *not* know?" At that moment God took control of me, and out of

my mouth the words came quietly, “Let’s just say that for whatever you’ve done to me, I forgive you, and the slate is clean for both of us.” I didn’t do that under *my own* power; that was God working in me. And God reminded me of what Jesus Christ said when they nailed Him on the cross: “Father, forgive them, for they know not what they are doing” (Luke 23:24).

Amends can be offering to make financial restitution. Once, God brought to my mind something I had done and lied about twenty years earlier that involved damaging someone else’s property. I *really* didn’t want to confess that lie, but again, back to the 8th Step: was I willing to come clean? I confessed what I’d done, and offered to pay for the damage I’d caused.

Amends can be doing whatever it takes to try to restore a relationship, to make it right. After committing adultery, lying, and destroying my marriage, making amends to my wife included asking her, after years of separation, to trust enough to risk going with me to Christian marriage counseling. You see, God put it on my heart that *I* have to do everything *I* can to reconcile my marriage. Romans 12:18 says, “If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone.”

For the trust I’d shattered to be restored, I had to show that I’d really changed. I had to wait for as long as it took. Why, Lord? Why am I waiting on a marriage I’d destroyed, on a love that had *died*? God reminded me that he *specializes* in resurrections. How long, Lord, how long do I have to wait? And He told me, simply and clearly, “Wait.” First Corinthians 13 says, “Love is patient, ... it ... always hopes, always perseveres. Love never fails.” Again, who’s will was I following, and was I willing to do whatever it took to make amends?

Did she see some change and repentance in me? Two days after hearing me publicly confess my sins to ten thousand people here at Saddleback, she agreed to go with me to counseling. My part now is to keep doing everything I can to restore that relationship. And I

must continue to be willing to let God change me into the man and husband He wants me to be. For me, that includes working a *serious* program with my accountability partners to guard against sin. Thanks guys, you really make a big difference in my life.

And God told me, “I will *heal* your family.”

But sometimes there is no way to make amends; to ask forgiveness, to make restitution, to reconcile. What if the person is not available to talk to? What if there’s nothing I can possibly do to make amends? What if I’ve caused permanent damage? Or worse?

When I was in my early twenties, I got a woman pregnant. For my selfish reasons, we had the pregnancy aborted. Although I didn’t know it at the time, God says that abortion is wrong, that it’s a sin.

In my 5th Step I confessed and repented for this sin, and received God’s forgiveness, but *who* do I talk to to make amends for this? How can I make amends for taking my unborn child’s life? What restitution can I offer for the life I took?

The answer is, there is no way to make amends, to repay my child for the life I took. So what can I do? God told me to write a letter, and after I wrote it, I asked God to read it to my child in heaven. I’m going to read part of it to you now.

Dear child:

As a part of my 12-Step recovery program, based on the Word of God our Father, found in the Bible, I have realized that I harmed you and must make amends. I want to make amends, but nothing I can do, think, or say can make amends for taking your life, for which I am guilty.

My child, I won’t try to make hollow excuses or rationalize, but I will tell you that I was blind to God’s truth at that time. It is only recently that I have been convicted that a child is a person and God’s predestined creation at the moment of its conception and that to end that life intentionally is a sin. This truth is eternal, but I did not acknowledge it then; I do now.

I am guilty of this sin. I am sorry for what I did to harm you. I have asked God our Father for forgiveness for this sin. I have repented from this sin and my wrong way of thinking and will never do this again.

I know that I will see you in heaven.

Love,

Dad

Thanks for letting me share.