

FORGIVING



Grace

WHEN I WAS A YOUNG LAD, I spent a few weeks one summer with my Uncle Floyd and Aunt Estelle in Beloit, Wisconsin. Three distinct memories from this summer remain with me. The first is the memory of seeing my very first (and, as it turned out, only) major league baseball game—the Chicago Cubs vs. the Milwaukee Braves. The second, rather unpleasant memory is of scaling and gutting my first fish.

The third, and most painful memory of all is of breaking Uncle Floyd and Aunt Estelle's back porch window.

The transgression occurred after we had returned home from that momentous baseball game. I was out back, tossing a newly-acquired ball against the side of their barn. Of course, in my youthful imagination, I was really standing on the mound, pitching for the Braves. My pitch fell squarely inside the imagined strikezone and ricocheted back into my glove. When I whipped around to throw the man out at first, the ball sailed right through that large, expensive window.

Uncle Floyd was not at all impressed with my athletic prowess. His more pressing concern was for the eventual replacement of the window, and the immediate warming of my backside.

Uncle Floyd was a colorful character—especially for a young boy. He smoked big smelly cigars, had a cauliflower ear as a souvenir from his

youthful boxing days, and could pepper his conversation with words I never heard in Sunday School. And, not surprisingly, completing the package was his explosive temper.

Hauled back by the scruff of my neck to the scene of my crime, I felt a chill pass down through my spine. Was this to be my day of reckoning? Was this to be my last day breathing the fresh air of freedom? Was this to be my last day on earth?

Uncle Floyd had every right to be angry with me.

So does my heavenly Father.

The difference is grace.



Too many Christians restrict the scope of God's grace to His one-time grace exhibited at the cross. It is true that we came to Christ the first time utterly devoid of worth; there was nothing at all within us that could merit salvation. Because of this, our salvation required God's grace—His unmerited kindness or favor. But why should we think that after that moment of first grace we now *do* merit His favor?

The relationship of grace does not change. Before we came to Christ we did not deserve God's grace, and after even decades of walking with

Him, we remain undeserving.

An understanding of God's continuing, tireless, inexhaustible grace is the foundation of our relationship with Him. For we will inevitably pass through times when our heart grows cold to Him. Weighed down by the gravity of flesh, we become selfish, short-tempered, arrogant, perhaps even rebellious. When we return to God in submission and confession, acknowledging Him as Lord, acknowledging our sins before Him, what will be His response? How will the Lord answer our confession?

With grace.

Therefore, since we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession. For we do not have a high priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but One who has been tempted in all things as we are, yet without sin. Therefore let us draw near with confidence to the throne of grace, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.

Hebrews 4:14-16



Grace.

Let the word linger on the tongue. Let it roll and tumble around in your mind.

Don't let go of it too soon. Caress it, and let it caress you, for grace is a perfect God's warm, forgiving embrace of an imperfect soul. Grace is God putting His arm around us, looking the believer straight in the eye, and saying, I know who you are. I know what you are. I know all about your problems, your frustrations, your failures. I know it all. And I love you anyway.

Grace is God saying, "Jesus."

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. I thank my God always concerning you for the grace of God which was given you in Christ Jesus.

1 Corinthians 1:3-4

After our submission and confession, once our communion with Jesus Christ has been restored, all else fades into insignificance. The press of deadlines, the harried life of parenthood, tension with co-workers, personal failings that bludgeon our spirit—all these and more become manageable once they are shared with the One who envelops us in His grace.

In the eyes of Jesus we have broken many windows. We have stepped away from His righteousness, we have gone our own way, turned our back on Him. When we do return to Him, hat in hand, He has every right to be angry. He has every right to drag us back to the scene of our transgression and rub our nose in it.
But He doesn't.
And that is grace.