

Extravagant Grace in the Gospel

Romans 5:15-21

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“But the free gift is not like the trespass. For if many died through one man’s trespass, much more have the grace of God and the free gift by the grace of that one man Jesus Christ abounded for many. And the free gift is not like the result of that one man’s sin. For the judgment following one trespass brought condemnation, but the free gift following many trespasses brought justification. For if, because of one man’s trespass, death reigned through that one man, much more will those who receive the abundance of grace and the free gift of righteousness reign in life through the one man Jesus Christ. Therefore, as one trespass led to condemnation for all men, so one act of righteousness leads to justification and life for all men. For as by the one man’s disobedience the many were made sinners, so by the one man’s obedience the many will be made righteous. Now the law came in to increase the trespass, but where sin increased, grace abounded all the more, so that, as sin reigned in death, grace also might reign through righteousness leading to eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.”
(Romans 5:15–21, ESV)

The church that we call College Park began twenty-eight years ago with ten families that met at the Holiday Inn in Casino Room B. The vision was to plant a church in the northern suburbs of Indianapolis through the Indiana Fellowship of Regular Baptist Churches under the leadership and teaching of Kimber Kauffman. That group of believers began to spiritually and numerically grow under the faithful exposition of God’s Word, and ten acres were purchased at our present site of 96th and Towne. Over time additional acres were purchased, the first sanctuary was built in 1992, and the church grew to over 1,000 people. God’s hand was clearly on this church.

In 1997, a second sanctuary was built, and it held about 900 people. And people continued to come to College Park, many of them due to the church’s radio ministry. It wasn’t long until the church was consistently averaging over 2,000 people each Sunday. God’s hand was still on this church, and during this season the Elders identified ten historic and cultural principles in a wise attempt to capture the essence and the values of what God seemed to be doing in College Park. These principles put into writing the unique reality and personality of our church.

In 2008, the Lord called our family to College Park, and the Elders had already begun a process of clarifying our mission and the historic principles in a way that was more memorable and useful. The church’s mission statement was long and there were too many principles to remember. Therefore, a sub-team of the Elders worked to develop a mission statement and core values that were memorable and reflective of the history of our church.

Now you need to know that this was more than just an exercise in wording. We felt the weight of trying to capture the essence of God’s work in the church’s history and the need to clarify for the

church's future what God had done in the life of College Park Church. We wanted to articulate a mission and core values would help guide our church in the future.

Core Values Matter

Churches change over time. New people join, the numbers change, different staff and Elders serve, and our community changes. But a clear mission and compelling values help to preserve the unique story of God in a congregation. Core Values matter because they reinforce the beautiful story that God has been writing in a group of people, and they help to shape new expressions of our church's identity in the future. Core Values help us keep our DNA as we grow and as time passes.

Hopefully as you have made your way around our church, you have noticed our Mission and our Core Values. We intentionally displayed them in our atrium so that you would see them and remember who we are as a church.

Our mission is: "Igniting a passion to follow Jesus." It is the singular pursuit that every aspect of this ministry is driving towards. It is our unique way of expressing who we are as a church. Our six Core Values reflect what we want the culture of our church to look like. They are displayed in the atrium as though they are wrapping around the sanctuary. Each of them is uniquely important:

- **Pre-eminence of Jesus**
- **Authority of the Word**
- **Redemptive Community**
- **Unity in Diversity**
- **Extravagant Grace**
- **Call to Go!**

These are the values that shape who we are, how we accomplish our mission, and what makes this church special. They reflect the hand of God upon this church over its twenty-eight year history.

Defining Extravagant Grace

What do we mean by the term "Extravagant Grace"? Here is how we have defined it:

We desire to be a community of believers, who treat others with the same extravagant grace that God has lavished upon us. We yearn to demonstrate this grace through our church culture and our lives in a way that is transparent, real, and helpful. We are blessed to be a blessing to each other, the city of Indianapolis, and the world.

This statement reflects the heart of a few of the historical and cultural principles:

"We treat others in a way that reflects how God has treated us"
"If we make a mistake, we make it on the side of love"

“We are blessed to be a blessing”

For the next three weeks, I want to spend some time looking into scripture and talking about the Core Value of Extravagant Grace. Let me give you a few reasons why we are doing this:

1. I think the Core Value of Extravagant Grace is one of the most unique aspects about College Park and her history. It was one of the things that attracted me to this church, and the more I have learned about this value, the more I have become convinced that it is part of the special blessing of God.
2. Other Core Values are more frequently highlighted with other emphases in the church. We have spotlight events like REACH that highlight the Call to Go!, and we have Small Groups and Big Groups where we experience Redemptive Community. But Extravagant Grace is less about *what* we do and more about *how* we do it.
3. A commitment to Extravagant Grace is easy to lose. Small churches can struggle with Extravagant Grace too but for different reasons. In the midst of well-developed forms, high-functioning programs, and wisely-written policies, large churches can quickly lose this value. It can become easy to justify not being extravagant in how we handle grace.

While I think we are still doing very well in living out this value, I want to spend some time rehearsing what this value means, what the Bible says about it, and praying about how we can live it out even better as individuals and as a church.

The Starting Point: The Gospel

Extravagant grace is rooted in the most basic message of the church – the gospel. This is the starting point, the reason why we would talk about this subject, and why it would be one of our Core Values. Now we have to get this starting point right or two things will happen.

First, our motivation will just be to “do good for good sake.” While commendable at one level, good for good sake misses the real beauty and power of what “good” is supposed to do. The kindness of God is meant to lead people to repentance (see Romans 2:4).

Secondly, our grace will not be too limited in its application or its extent. Left to ourselves we will do just enough or the bare minimum. But an orientation of the gospel changes to whom we extend grace and the extent to which we will extend grace.

Sounderstanding the gospel and rehearsing the gospel is the only way that Extravagant Grace really works. The gospel is the biblical and motivational starting point, and that is why I’ve chosen Romans 5 as our text for today. It is a signature text when it comes to essence of the gospel.

Let’s see what this text tells us.

1. Sinners need grace

I know this is very basic, but it is really important to start here. Verse 15 says “the free gift is not like the trespass.” In Chapter five, Paul is contrasting the fall of Adam with the sacrifice of Christ. So Christ is the free gift, and the trespass is what happened due to Adam’s failure.

Now verse twelve identifies what happened: *“Therefore, just as sin came into the world through one man, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men because all sinned.”* (Romans 5:12, ESV)

The Fall introduced sin, brokenness, hardship, suffering, imperfection, and death into the equation of the human experience. The effects were cataclysmic and sweeping – “death spread to all men.” And that means that everything in the world was foundationally tainted by sin, and mankind’s relationship with God was damaged.

Chapter five is filled with great references to the problem that the Fall created:

- v 6 – humans beings are weak and helpless from a spiritual standpoint
- v 8 – identifies that we are all sinners
- v 10 – our sin made us the enemies of God

Now this is the condition of the whole world and every human being. Every person born experiences a world that is broken and a heart that is not complete. While there is still beauty and happiness and rest, it is never complete and total. Sin created a gap between the way things should be and the way they are.

The effect is that every single person ever born experiences this spiritual and personal brokenness. It manifests itself in selfish motives, hurtful actions, addictive behaviors, and reckless acts. But it also shows up in illness, suffering, unfair treatment, bad things that happen, and tragic accidents. We are broken people who live in a broken world. That is the problem. That is *the* problem.

It is important that you see the world through this lens. There is a universal problem (sin), and it affects every single person. So the world in which we live has great need in it. It is all around us; it is in us. Our world is broken, and we are broken.

Why do we need to start here? Because the need for extravagant grace is huge! Everyone has the same problem. And here’s the other thing: the church is the only means by which the correct diagnosis and the right solution is offered. Without the church, there is no transmission of the gospel. If the church doesn’t demonstrate extravagant grace, no one will.

This is one of the reasons why we are talking about this Core Value. It is what people need; it is what the church’s mission is all about; and we tend to forget about this important aspect of our role and the church’s role in the world. Everyone is broken at some level and the world is broken at many levels. And the church understands this better than anyone.

2. Jesus brought grace

Having identified the problem, we now come to the solution of the gospel. And it is a glorious, life-transforming story. Let's follow Paul's argument in verses 15-19.

He is contrasting the problem of Adam's fall with the redemption that is in Jesus Christ. Notice what he says:

- v 15 – the gift of Jesus abounded for many
- v 16 – His death brought justification
- v 17 – as death reigned through Adam, grace reigns through Jesus
- v 18 – Jesus began the process of curse reversal
- v 19 – Grace eclipses sin

The picture is very clear. Helpless, sinful, and condemned people who are subject to the tragic effects of the Fall are rescued by the grace that comes through Jesus Christ. The tragedy of the Fall can be reversed by the personal sacrifice of Jesus Christ.

On a personal level, it means that we were helpless sinners and under the condemnation of God until we were rescued by the gracious work of Jesus. We are undeserving sinners who deserved nothing but condemnation, judgment and hopelessness. But God was kind beyond words to us in our redemption through His Son. God applied the work of His righteous Son to unrighteous people, and He punished His innocent Son to save guilty sinners.

Now just stop and ponder that for a moment! If you have received Christ, think about how much grace you have received. Think about how spiritually helpless you were and how much it cost Jesus to rescue you. Think of the level of debt that you owed and think about how incredibly gracious it was that God forgave you. Paul described it this way in 2 Corinthians 8:9 as the basis for motivating the people in Corinth to live gracious lives.

"For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, so that you by his poverty might become rich." (2 Corinthians 8:9, ESV)

This is the lens through which we are to see everyone in life – *"We desire to be a community of believers, who treat others with the same extravagant grace that God has lavished upon us."* In other words, as we understand the beauty of the gospel in our own lives we are compelled to treat people in a way that fits with this glorious reality. The more you understand and meditate upon the gospel, the more you are able and willing to live out the gospel.

The gospel not only changes you, but it also changes what you see in others. It changes your orientation in life such that you see people through a gospel, extravagant grace lens. In other words, if you have tasted grace, you will want to give grace. You will be compelled to do so.

Here is the case 1 John makes:

“By this we know love, that he laid down his life for us, and we ought to lay down our lives for the brothers. But if anyone has the world’s goods and sees his brother in need, yet closes his heart against him, how does God’s love abide in him? Little children, let us not love in word or talk but in deed and in truth.” (1 John 3:16–18, ESV)

It just makes sense that people who have been given extravagant grace will be filled with extravagant grace.

3. Grace wins!

The final thing we note here is what grace accomplishes. Paul ends this section with a powerful statement about the beauty and power of the gospel. Verses 20-21 show us that, in the end, grace wins!

“Now the law came in to increase the trespass, but where sin increased, grace abounded all the more, so that, as sin reigned in death, grace also might reign through righteousness leading to eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.” (Romans 5:20–21, ESV)

This is so compelling and encouraging! Notice that the text tells us that even though our sin is great, grace is even greater – it abounded all the more! The text tells us that while sin reigned leading to death, grace reigned through righteousness. What is here? The hope of all hopes.

It is the message that has changed our lives, and it is the message that can change other people’s lives. It can change people from the inside out. The extravagant grace of God gives people hope when they would have none. It addresses the longing of your soul, fixing the brokenness of your relationship with God through Christ. Extravagant grace means that where sin abounded, grace abounded all the more!

Turning Theology in Practice

But there is something more here that we will look at in the next two weeks, and it relates to the connection between theology and how we really live. Extravagant grace is first a theological issue, but it is also very practical. It relates to how we live in a world filled with brokenness.

Every day you and I will come into the contact with the effects of a broken world. At a very basic level, you will encounter people who are unhappy, impatient, rude, and easily angered. They are just like you apart from God’s grace. And the question is: How will you respond to them?

There will be plenty of times in your life when you will be wronged and grievously sinned against. People will do things that will create pain in your life, and the question is: How will you respond to them?

Life will be filled with all kinds of tragedies. Terrible things will happen and the older you get the more you will see. And the question is: How will you respond?

The beauty of extravagant grace is that it wins in the midst of a broken world. When you are kind as others are rude – grace wins! When you forgive when others would seek revenge – grace wins! And when the brokenness of the world gives us an opportunity bring some level of God’s mercy – grace wins!

I know that there are many days when you look around at the state of the world, and you must feel what I feel – that evil and brokenness and sin are powerful. But every time we embrace an extravagant mindset, we are declaring boldly: *“where sin abounded, grace abounds all the more.”*

College Park Church has been a place filled with extravagant grace over the years. We are not a perfect church, but there are some amazing stories of the ways our people have reached out in the midst of the tragedy and poured out extravagant grace.

One such story is connected to a dear family to this ministry – the family of Dr. Charles Ware who is the President of Crossroads Bible College. I’ve asked him to come today to share a story where tragedy was met with grace, a story of the way that grace won!

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