



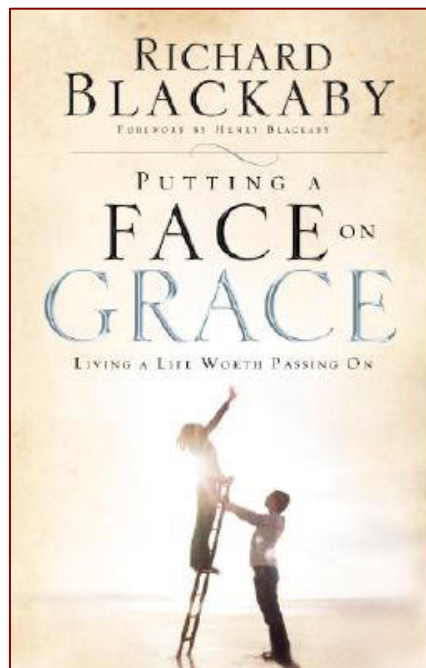
DEAN WELCH – TEACHER



WEEKLY SUNDAY SCHOOL LESSON


JUNE 28, 2009

LESSON #4 FROM THE *MASTER WORKS* SERIES STUDY OF:



TROUBLE AT HOME—WHEN MAMA AIN'T HAPPY...

[WEEK #4—PUTTING A FACE ON GRACE]

 During the rehearsal for her wedding a nervous bride was having a difficult time remembering all the details. Her pastor took her aside at the end of the night and said, "When you enter the church tomorrow, you will be walking down the same aisle you've walked down many times before. Concentrate on the aisle. And when you get halfway down the aisle, concentrate on the altar. And, when you reach the end of the aisle, your groom will be waiting for you. Concentrate on him. Focus on the aisle, then look at the altar, and finally, lock eyes with your man. That's all you have to do."

That seemed to help a lot, and on the day of the wedding, the beautiful but nervous bride walked flawlessly down the aisle. But people were a bit taken aback as they heard her repeating these words during the processional, "Aisle—Alter—Him. Aisle—Alter—Him. **I'll alter him.**" I'm not sure how much success she had at changing her spouse, but there were probably a number of wives wishing her well that day.

Today we'll be talking about grace in marriage and family relationships. I read where a wise sage was once asked what was so remarkable about love at first sight. Nothing, he said! But what **IS** so amazing is that after 10, 20 or 30 years of living, listening, learning, etc., the love still exists. We know it's a challenge to keep marriage alive, don't we, and to express grace on top of that is even harder at times? *Charles Swindoll tells the story of little four-year-old Susie who, at school one day, heard for the first time the story of Snow White and the 7 Dwarfs. Susie sat in rapt attention as she heard about the wicked witch, the poisonous apple, Snow White eating the apple, Prince Charming coming along, kissing Snow White, loving her and charming her. Little Susie couldn't wait to get home and tell her mother the story, but she didn't tell her mother the ending. Her mother asked, "And, Susie, do you know what happened then. They lived happily ever after!" Little Susie looked back at her*

mother and said, "Oh no, Mother. They got married!" In such childlike innocence she made her response - now that's real life - and it's not the same. Marriage is a tough assignment. We need all the help we can get. Two people coming together with sinful natures, living in a sinful world - a hard place. When the fun and games have passed, the glow of the honeymoon is over, disease takes its toll, death of a child, family turns against you.... what then? Only with God's grace can we endure and express God's heart to our family.

As we continue with Week Four of our bible study from Dr. Blackaby's book, *Putting A Face On Grace*, we're studying about using a little grace in our family relationships—which sometimes seems harder to do than in any other place. Thus, the title on the board: Trouble at Home: When Mama Ain't Happy... We all know the rest of that saying says, *"then nobody's happy!"* **Why is it so hard to show grace in family relationships?** I've heard it said on numerous occasions that, *"You can choose your friends—but you can't choose your family!"* So, let me continue the point of the opening story about the bride thinking she would *"alter"* her groom with what we're talking about this morning. If we're serious about following Christ, each of us comes face-to-face with the reality that **HE** will **ALTER** our lives and help us be more **GRACE-FILLED** in our family relationships. Don't forget the powerful reminder from God's Word that *"nothing is impossible for God"* (LUKE 1:37).

We've learned over these past few weeks that grace is an undeserved gift and is something that God wants us to express to others—it shows others His heart. As Dr. Blackaby reminded us in our bible study this week, if there's one place we should be generous with grace, it's in our home. Family relationships are at the center of all human relationships. The place where each of us begins to learn about how relationships work is within the family. The home is where people first experience love. Home is where people should find security and forgiveness. Yet, unfortunately, the words **HOME** and **GRACE** don't always blend. For too many

people, the most painful moments of their lives occurred at home. How tragic!

As we try to get a grasp on what expressing grace in our marriage and family means, turn to **EPHESIANS 5:21-25 (NIV)** and follow along: ²¹**SUBMIT** *to one another out of **REVERENCE** for Christ.* ²²*Wives, submit to your husbands as to the Lord.* ²³*For the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the church, his body, of which he is the Savior.* ²⁴*Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit to their husbands in everything.* ²⁵*Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her.*

I find that so many people start with verse 22, but leave off the true meaning of what Paul is really saying. **What does verse 21 say to the body of Christ?** [WE ARE TO SUBMIT TO ONE ANOTHER] **What does that mean? Why are we to submit?** [OUT OF REVERENCE FROM CHRIST] OK, see if you can identify with this scene: *You came home cranky because a deadline got moved up. She came home grumpy because of a tough day. Each of you was wanting a little sympathy from the other, but neither got any. So there you sit at the dinner table—cranky and grumpy—with little Emily, your daughter. Emily folds her hands to pray (as she has been taught), and the two of you bow your heads (but not your hearts) and listen. From where this prayer comes, God only knows. “God, it’s Emily. How are you? I’m fine, thank you. Mom and Dad are mad. I don’t know why. We’ve got birds and toys and mashed potatoes and each other. Maybe you can get them to stop being mad? Please do, or it’s just gonna be you and me having any fun tonight. Amen.” The prayer is answered before it’s finished, you both look up in the middle and laugh at the end and shake your heads and say you’re sorry. And you both thank God for the little voice who reminded you about what matters. That’s the reality of what grace looks like in a family. But, easier said than done!*



In the marriage, there should be mutual love and submission. Of course, everyone has their own idea of love and submission, but let me be very careful to note that nowhere does it say that a wife is to obey her husband. We're told in Colossians 3 that children are to obey (v. 20) and slaves are to obey (v.22). Ephesians 5:21 is clear: *"Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ."* Both husbands and wives are to submit to each other—and that means we are to be "grace-filled" not "grace-less." It's not about getting even or allowing our hurts to escalate into revenge, is it?

A family in trouble is a common experience, but it's never a pretty picture. Did you hear about the classified ad in a San Francisco newspaper a couple of years ago that read, "2007 Mercedes SL550, fully loaded? First \$50 gets the car." A man read this and called to see if it was a misprint. To his surprise it was not. He rushed over there and gave the woman the \$50 and as she handed over the title to the car he asked why she was selling it for so cheap. She replied, "My husband just called from Las Vegas where he is with his secretary. He lost all of his money and wanted me to sell the car and send half of what I got for it to him so he could come home!" I'm sending him his half today—\$25.

We read verses 21-25 of Ephesians 4 a moment ago, but let's take a moment and finish reading through verse 30 of Ephesians 5, starting again with verses 25 (NLT): *²⁵For husbands, this means love your wives, just as Christ loved the church. He gave up his life for her ²⁶to make her holy and clean, washed by the cleansing of God's word. ²⁷He did this to present her to himself as a glorious church without a spot or wrinkle or any other blemish. Instead, she will be holy and without fault. ²⁸In the same way, husbands ought to love their wives as they love their own bodies. For a man who loves his wife actually shows love for himself. ²⁹No one hates his own body but feeds and cares for it, just as Christ cares for the church. ³⁰And we are members of his body.*

Did you see it? I think it's important to note that in Ephesians 5 Paul devotes twice as many words telling husbands to love their

wives as he did in telling wives to submit to their husbands. Remember this idea of grace has a lot to do with love! Men, we're told that we're to love our wives in the same way that Christ loves the church. That means I must love Beverly to the point of dying for her—in that Christ loved the Church so much that He died for us.

I recently read an amazing demonstration of that kind of sacrifice that happened in Athens, Georgia. Randy Burriss was in his front yard when a young mother walked by with her two-month-old daughter in a stroller. Just then a car screeched around the corner, lost control and headed straight for them. The mother tried to push the stroller into the grass but it got stuck. Burriss grabbed the handle from her, ran toward the lawn and was hit in mid-stride. The baby girl and mother were fine, but Randy Burriss was killed instantly. That's the kind of love that God is challenging husbands to have for their wives. The kind of love that is willing to die for another.

Turn to **Colossians 3:18-19 (NIV)**: *"¹⁸Wives, submit to your husbands, as is fitting in the Lord. ¹⁹Husbands, love your wives and do not be harsh with them.* What does the last part of verse 19 say to husbands? Yes, *"do not be harsh"* with their wives. This phrase can also be translated, "Don't become embittered [or resentful] toward her." We must show God's grace in our marriage relationship. That means that husbands must prevent a sour attitude from taking root. The only other time this word is used in the New Testament, it refers to something bitter in taste. Paul is telling husbands not to call their wives "honey" and then act like vinegar. Husbands, as well as wives, must follow the challenge of **HEBREWS 12:15 (NIV)**: *"See to it that no one misses the GRACE of God and that no bitter root GROWS up to cause trouble and defile many."*

Since we've learned that grace is a lot like love, I'm reminded this morning of some very specific words by Paul about our individual responsibilities. Listen to these words from **ROMANS**

12: 18 (NIV), ¹⁸“If it is possible, as far as it depends on YOU, live at PEACE with everyone.” **What does that mean in our marriage and family relationships? And how would it really look in practice?**

We know what God’s Word tells us and that we are to be forgiving and express God’s grace to all—remembering it’s giving what is **NOT DESERVED**—yet we struggle so much, especially in our family relationships. You’ve probably been sorting through the tough questions about this: Why does life get so *relatively* difficult? If we expect anyone to be sensitive to our needs, it is our family members. When we hurt physically, we want our family to respond. When we struggle emotionally, we want our family to know. But sometimes they act like they don’t know. Sometimes they act like they don’t care.

In her book *Irregular People*, Joyce Landorf tells of a woman in her thirties who learned that she needed a mastectomy. She and her mother seldom communicated, so the daughter was apprehensive about telling her. One day over lunch, she decided to reveal the news. “Mother, I just learned that I am going to have a mastectomy.” The mother was silent. The daughter asked her if she had heard. The mother nodded her head. Then she calmly dismissed the subject by saying, “You know your sister has the best recipe for chicken enchiladas.”

How do you show God’s grace in these situations? What can you do when those closest to you keep their distance and are anything but graceful? When you can get along with others, but you and your kin can’t? Does Jesus have anything to say about dealing with difficult relatives? Is there an example of Jesus bringing peace to a painful family? Yes, there is.

His own! It may surprise you to know that Jesus had a difficult family. It may surprise some of you to know that Jesus had a family at all! You may not be aware that Jesus had brothers and sisters. He did. Quoting Jesus’ hometown critics, listen to what



Mark wrote in **MARK 6:3 (NCV)**, *"[Jesus] is just the carpenter, the son of Mary and the brother of James, Joseph, Judas, and Simon. And his sisters are here with us."* And it may surprise you to know that his family was less than perfect. They were. If your family doesn't appreciate you, take heart, neither did Jesus'. The very next verse, in **MARK 6:4** tells us, *"A prophet is honored everywhere except in his hometown and with his own people and in his own home."*

I wonder what he meant when he said those last five words. He went to the synagogue where he was asked to speak. The people were proud that this hometown boy had done well—until they heard what he said. He referred to himself as the Messiah, the one to fulfill prophecy. Their response? "Isn't this Joseph's son?" Translation? This is no Messiah! He's just like us! He's the plumber's kid from down the street. He's the accountant on the third floor. He's the construction worker who used to date my sister. God doesn't speak through familiar people.

One minute he was a hero, the next a heretic. Look what happens next. Turn to **LUKE 4:29-30 (NCV)**: *"They got up, forced Jesus out of town, and took him to the edge of the cliff on which the town was built. They planned to throw him off the edge, but Jesus walked through the crowd and went on his way."* What an ugly moment! Jesus' neighborhood friends tried to kill him. But even uglier than what we see is what we don't see. Notice what is missing from this verse. Note what words should be there, but aren't. *"They planned to throw him over the cliff, but Jesus' brothers came and stood up for him."*

We'd like to read that, but we can't because it doesn't say that. That's not what happened. When Jesus was in trouble, his brothers were invisible. They weren't always invisible, however. There was a time when they spoke. There was a time when they were seen with him in public. Not because they were proud of him but because they were ashamed of him. Listen to these words from **MARK 3:21 (NCV)**: *"His family ... went to get him because they thought he was out of his mind."*

Jesus' siblings thought their brother was a lunatic. They weren't proud—they were embarrassed! "He's off the deep end, Mom. You should hear what people are saying about him." "People say he's loony." "Yeah, somebody asked me why we don't do something about him." "It's a good thing Dad isn't around to see what Jesus is doing." Hurtful words spoken by those closest to Jesus. Here are some more, as recorded in **JOHN 7:3-5 (NCV)**:
³So Jesus' brothers said to him, "You should leave here and go to Judea so your followers there can see the miracles you do.⁴ Anyone who wants to be well known does not hide what he does. If you are doing these things, show yourself to the world."⁵ (Even Jesus' brothers did not believe in him.)

Listen to the sarcasm in those words! They drip with ridicule. How does Jesus put up with these guys? How can you believe in yourself when those who know you best don't? How can you move forward when your family wants to pull you back? When you and your family have two different agendas, what do you do? Jesus gives us some answers.

It's worth noting that he didn't try to control his family's behavior, nor did he let their behavior control his. He didn't demand that they agree with him. He didn't sulk when they insulted him. He didn't make it his mission to try to please them. Each of us has a fantasy that our family will be like the Waltons, an expectation that our dearest friends will be our next of kin. Jesus didn't have that expectation. Look how he defined his family in **MARK 3:35 (NCV)**: *"My true brother and sister and mother are those who do what God wants."*

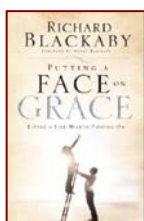
When Jesus' brothers didn't share his convictions, he didn't try to force them. He recognized that his spiritual family could provide what his physical family didn't. If Jesus himself couldn't force his family to share his convictions, what makes you think you can force yours? We can't control the way our family responds to us. When it comes to the behavior of others toward us, our hands are tied. We have to move beyond the naive expectation that if

we do good, people will treat us right. The fact is they may and they may not—we cannot control how people respond to us. But no matter what we are to express God’s gentleness and His grace. Jesus did not let the difficult dynamic of his family overshadow his call from God. Listen to these words about how we are to respond, no matter what, from **PHILIPPIANS 4: 5-8 (NCV)**: *⁵Let everyone see that you are GENTLE and KIND. The Lord is coming soon.⁶Do not worry about anything, but pray and ask God for everything you need, always giving thanks. ⁷And God's peace, which is so great we cannot understand it, will keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. ⁸Brothers and sisters, think about the things that are good and worthy of praise. Think about the things that are true and honorable and right and pure and beautiful and respected.*

When we express grace and kindness to our spouses and family, as Christ does to us, there’s no telling what will happen. Do you recall what happened to Jesus’ family after all the ridicule and belittling? Turn to **ACTS 1: 12, 14 (NCV)** and follow along: *“Then [the disciples] went back to Jerusalem from the Mount of Olives.... They all continued praying together with some women, including Mary the mother of Jesus, and Jesus’ brothers.”*

What a change! The ones who mocked him now worship him. The ones who pitied him now pray for him. What if Jesus had disowned them? Or worse still, what if he’d suffocated his family with his demand for change? He didn’t. **He instead gave them SPACE, TIME,** and **GRACE**. And because he did, they changed.

Everything we do in marriage, in the family, and in the workplace must be done in recognition that we have a Master over us. As such our attitude should always be to please Him, whether through submitting or loving, obeying or encouraging, working or supervising. Our master will reward us for our service to Him. So don’t lose heart. Even when it’s hard and not fair to show grace and love, do so anyway! Let’s pray!



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