

The Sharing Style – Passing on the Grace of God
Acts 8:1-8, 26-35

Brothers and sisters, this morning in our series on nine ways to grow spiritually we will be looking at the Sharing Style, which is about experiencing God by passing on the grace of God.

Now we have received more than a subtle hint as to what that is all about from the scripture passages which we just read – but let me tell you another story about sharing the grace of God, and we could call it “A tale about of two ways of sharing.”

And the first way of sharing was illustrated by my mother when she was a young adult on a mission trip with a local church in Salt Lake City Utah, which is course known for its predominantly Mormon population.

Now part of the mission work she was doing with this local church involved going door-to-door to speak with people about the gospel of Jesus – and I hope you don’t miss the

irony of having Christians going door-to-door in Mormon neighborhoods...

Anyways – my mom and another girl had been out canvassing a neighborhood all afternoon without much success and as they knocked on yet another door, it was answered by yet another Mormon who began to list the same reasons as his neighbors for why He did not need to hear about Jesus.

My mother’s frustration peaked at this point and she blurted out – unintentionally – *“don’t you know you are going to go to hell?!”*

Now my recollection of the details after this point are hazy – but the long and the short of it is that my mother somehow ended up seeing this man again before the end of the mission trip and she wanted to apologize to him for being so confrontational, however he would have none of it.

Instead he said *“that was exactly what I needed to hear!”*

Apparently, it got him thinking about his eternal destiny and

helped him to realize that He needed to trust in Jesus as His savior”

Now the other way of sharing was illustrated by yours truly – I was back home from university for the summer and enjoying the afternoon out in front of my house when a pimped out little Ford Topaz, its stereo system thumping as best the teenaged owner could afford - careened past and a bag of McDonald’s garbage sailed out the window landing in front of my driveway.

The car then proceeded to pull into a driveway halfway down the block, and being rather ticked off by their careless littering in front of my house – I figured I would return the McDonald’s bag to its rightful owner and tell the punk what he could do with his trash.

So I did. I picked up the bag and walked down the street to where the car was parked and I threw the McDonald’s garbage on to their driveway and told them to keep their trash to themselves.

Well – my recollection of exact details after this point are hazy – but the long and short of it was that teens in the car began swearing at me and one of them tried to threaten me with a baseball bat.

So, at that point I figured – it’s not worth going to bat over an argument about some litter, so I did what any good Christian young adult would do... I said *“Hey - by the way... do you know God loves you and Jesus died for you?!”*

And I must confess that my sinful nature I took particular satisfaction in the apoplectic reaction that my witnessing had produced amongst the teenagers in this situation.

So, what we learn from this tale about two ways of sharing brothers and sisters is that our witnessing is only effective for its purpose if we are truly wanting to pass on the grace of God.

My mother was genuinely wanting to share with people about the grace of God in Jesus Christ so that in spite of some harsh

confrontational words, the grace of God found its way through... whereas I was just simply wanting to confront some entitled punks and put them in their place for disrespecting me.

And even though I ended up saying something non-confrontational and gracious – I was not operating out of a spirit of God’s grace and so my words did not bring grace or result in faith.

And I share this story as an example of how important it is that we grow in grace.

As we are looking at nine ways to grow spiritually, a very important part of our spiritual growth is growing in grace. And this is what defines the Sharing Style brothers and sisters – growing in God’s grace and passing on that grace on to others.

And that is also the key difference which distinguishes the Sharing style, not only from the other spiritual styles but also from its secular counterpart of charity work.

You see there are all sorts of ways we might “share” with other people – we can give to the food bank, donate winter clothing, help to maintain the local community skating rink... but the truth is that our motives for doing so that will determine the fruit, the results of our sharing – both for the people who receive it and in what it does for us.

Brothers and sisters if our sharing is not motivated or born out our experience of God’s grace then we won’t really experience God or grow in our relationship with Him as we practice this style - regardless of whether it is our natural style or not.

Rather we’ll just experience feeling good for being a nice person who is helping others out. And our actions won’t encourage people to put their faith in Jesus, instead our actions will only - as is so often said by someone who has received a helping hand - restore their faith in humanity.

So – are you eager to grow in God’s grace and learn about the Sharing style brothers and sisters? Then let’s start with defining God’s grace... by way of comparison.

As we've noted before, justice is when we get what we deserve. Mercy is when we don't get what we deserve... but grace... grace is when we get something really good that we don't deserve.

Now theologically speaking we know that if we received the justice we deserved - then indeed our final destiny would be burning in hell, because all of us have turned away from being the faithful covenant partners with God that He created us to be. That's justice.

But God in His great mercy has determined that we will not get what we deserve – Mercy.

Instead, we get something extremely good that we do not deserve - Christ's forgiveness of our sins, and His own covenant faithfulness with God substituted for our unfaithfulness – Grace!

Now – how have you experienced this doctrinal truth in your life, brothers and sisters? How did you come to realize what

you deserved from God, how have you seen him spare you from that, and what good thing did you get instead?

Some of you know the story of how I came to this realization when God mercifully spared my life in a motorbike accident when I was 16. I realized that if I had died, I was not certain that I would have spent eternity with the Lord - in fact I was convicted that would have gone to hell.

Not because I was such a terrible kid by our society's standards, but because I was convicted that the unbelief and resistance to God that I harbored in my heart separated me from Him in this life and as such I would have deserved that separation in the next.

But instead I received grace in the chance to continue to live – given an opportunity to trust in Jesus to forgive my doubt, unbelief and resistance to God and give me a new desire to follow and serve Him. I didn't deserve it – but it was given to me.

So that's how I have experienced God's grace in my life – how have you experienced God's grace in your life?

It doesn't have to be dramatic like a motorbike accident – it can be any series of events which occur that the Holy Spirit uses to help you realize those three key things - what you deserve, how you don't get what you deserve and then how you get something really good that you don't deserve.

Think of it like an equation; justice + mercy x grace.

For example, you might have been pulled over by the police for speeding, but instead of giving you a ticket the officer lets you off with a warning – and says *“since you are late for work I'll go ahead of you and give you a police escort to get you there quickly”*

Sounds ridiculous I know but the Holy Spirit could use such a situation to show you how the big-picture theological truth of how you personally stand before God as guilty but yet receive His mercy and grace in Jesus Christ and are thus saved by this

Grace... and how this applies specifically to your personal life and your actions.

Maybe you have a very clear example of it like I do – or maybe you're going to need to think about that for a bit, either way its good for us to reflect on this and revisit that sense of receiving something good that we don't deserve because that is how we grow in Grace and this is what fuels experiencing God in the Sharing Style. It's all about that Grace.

And brothers and sisters I'm going to say that Grace is even more important than Love, because I see Love defined in the scriptures as a result, its what the salvation equation equals.

Justice + Mercy x Grace = Love! If you take out the Grace then you remove the exponential factor that multiplies the Justice and Mercy into greater and greater amounts of Love. Love is the result- Grace is what produces it.

Now when I was 16 years old I wouldn't have been able to articulate it like this. I would have simply told you that when I

was laying there in the hospital that night I realized I needed to get serious about my relationship with God because if I had died I would have gone to hell, and then as I began to really believe in Jesus I was seized by an intense conviction that other people needed to believe in Jesus as well and I needed to share the gospel with them.

And that's why I say Grace is more important than Love – at least our cultural understanding of Love. Because it has been twisted into a subjective ideal that cherry-picks scripture verses and says “Do no harm.”

Which sounds lovely – except what do you do when someone says you are harming their self-esteem when you share what we deserve for our sin? What do you do when the truth that we deserve to go to hell is considered a harmful teaching, and that “it's not loving” to tell someone they are sinners who need to turn to Jesus for salvation?

This is why we need to understand that Grace is more important than Love! And that Love is not an ideal of “do not

harm” but rather it is the result of Justice + mercy multiplied by grace.

So, when we are reminded of, and we reflect on the undeserved nature of the all the good that we receive from God – and especially what we receive in Jesus Christ - we grow in grace and that also increases our Love.

And because that Love is the result of Grace – it's main concern and the way it expresses itself is through sharing God's Grace with others – and if the Sharing style is your natural style you will have an intense conviction to share God's grace – the good news about Jesus - with those outside the church regardless of whatever barriers might stand in the way.

It will just be easy and natural for you to go out and do that – just like the early church was doing in Acts 8.

Now I'm not sure if all of those early Christians were wired for the sharing style or not – but I do know that they had a very

good grasp of what it meant to experience God's grace and this motivated them to share that grace with others regardless of the barriers that were in the way.

And those barriers were significant, in 8:1 we read that a great persecution broke out against the Church. Stephen had been killed, Saul (Paul) was going around putting people in prison, Christians had to flee Jerusalem and ended up in Samaria – the land of the hated Samaritans.

Yet – in spite of all that we read that those who were scattered preached the word wherever they went and that Philip went down to a Samaritan city and did works of healing and deliverance for people there – and the result of this sharing of God's grace was that more and more people put their faith and trust in Jesus Christ and were included in the Church instead of being outside of the church.

Now I don't know about you – but when I read about these things in the scripture I am inspired as to what we can do to

share the gospel, God's grace with those outside the church in our community, and what could happen when we do that.

Now I'm sure some of you are thinking *"Ya we know you get inspired; you keep reminding us every month that we need to go out into the community on prayer drives and drop off welcome baskets for Philip Ministry Sundays."*

Well brothers and sisters that is true – I know the Lord has shown us that going out and making disciples and growing in the Sharing style is the growing edge for our congregation.

And I also know that our efforts in going out can become very efficient and effective if we simply cooperate with the Holy Spirit's direction as Philip did and have the Spirit show us who to approach because they are seeking and ready for us to share with them. God has already been preparing them for us to share the gospel with them.

But I must confess that I was convicted in preparing this message I realized that I have not encouraged us enough in

the Grace of God as our motivation for this. I have appealed more to our sense of duty and obedience and what is simply the right thing to do - than I have appealed to the undeserved Grace that we have received and experienced in our lives.

So I pray that as we have focused on God's grace this morning it will begin to help us grow, and that as we reflect on how we have experienced God's grace in our lives this coming week that it will cause our love to grow and that love will express itself in our willingness to go out and follow the Holy Spirit's guidance to engage our community and share the gospel with them.

That our prayer-drives and our welcome-basket drops will result in opportunities like Philip was given – where it says in 8:35 that *“Philip began with that very passage of Scripture and told him the good news about Jesus.”*

So brothers and sisters – may we get so full of God's grace that we are regularly having Spirit-led encounters where we

actually get to tell people about the good news of Jesus!
Amen?!

So – what I have just confessed and admitted to brothers and sister, highlights some of the important dynamics of spiritual growth that I really hope we take to heart from this series and they would become an instinctive part of how we approach our spiritual growth.

The first is that growing spiritually is not an individual and isolated exercise. God is a triune God; He is community in His very nature.

So growing to know each person of the Trinity more and more is facilitated by growing in spiritual community with our fellow Christians in Church, as we all have our preferred person of the Trinity and can help each other get to know God as 3 in 1.

And in what I've just confessed I hope you see an example of how the strength of my doctrinal style was a weakness as I neglected to focus us on God's grace for our motivation.

Since the Sharing Style is not my natural style, I don't always naturally put the emphasis and focus on Sharing the Grace of God, like I would emphasize thinking correctly about Grace.

It takes deliberate and intentional efforts to make sure that I include an emphasis on Grace, and it doesn't come as easy to me.

So I need people who have a natural Sharing Style, who find it easy to focus on grace, to help me include more of that in my teaching – but also to speak up and share that grace with the congregation and bring that grace to the rest of us.

As Hebrews 12:15 *“See to it – that no one misses out on the Grace of God so that no bitter root grows up to cause trouble.”*
Sharing Style people – this is your calling in the church!

This is how pursuing your Level A growth in your natural style is something that helps your fellow Valleyview-ers pursue that uncomfortable and difficult Level B growth in their opposite style.

And so the second spiritual growth principle is that our strength will become our weakness if we do not engage with other styles, and especially our opposite spiritual styles.

And that then goes back to the first spiritual growth principle because we need other Christians to help us to do this.

So now that we've pointed out how the Sharing Style helps us as the body of Christ to be reminded of God's grace and all the undeserved good things that we have received and how important that is to motivate us to engage in the Sharing Style so that we can grow in it.

I also need to encourage our Sharing Style people to be aware of how their strength can become a weakness and that they can prevent that by engaging their opposite Sacramental style.

If you only pursue your level A growth in the Sharing Style brothers and sisters, you will isolate yourself from the church, become overly critical and frustrated with the church, and

turn yourself against the very thing which you are trying to bring people into – ironic isn't it.

You can become so consumed with reaching people outside of the church that you neglect the fellowship, accountability and insight you need from your fellow believers – and without that support you will compromise the message of the gospel in your efforts to make it attractive and acceptable to those outside the church.

So, it is very important – Sharing Style people – that you stay connected to the worshipping community and engage your opposite Sacramental style as you do that. Even though that can be a difficult and challenging for you to do so.

The integrity and power of the very message of God's grace that you are so eager to share depends on your willingness to do this.

And – as I have already mentioned – the Church literally needs you to Grace us with your presence and participation so that

we are frequently reminded of how we have experienced God's grace in Jesus Christ...

And that will not only encourage us, but it will enable us to grow more and more in that Grace – and then following your example – we can also share that Grace with those outside the church.

So brothers and sister, as we seek to grow spiritually... as we are learning about all these different spiritual styles – and especially today as we are learning about the Sharing style...

May the Grace of our Lord Jesus Christ – all those wonderful amazing and good and undeserved benefits which we receive in Christ – May this Grace of our Lord Jesus Christ... be with you now – and always.

Amen.