

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

Brothers and sisters, if you were in attendance at our AGM a couple Sundays ago – you would have heard our elders sharing about some of the strengths of Valleyview and how they will be used as foundations for the New thing that the Holy Spirit is bringing about as we eventually become Spring Valley Community Church... and then spoke a bit about what exactly is going to be New about the new thing.

And in one of those instances that you don't plan, but it sort of comes together through the behind-the-scenes work of the Holy Spirit, it became evident that new thing will be the Holy Spirit changing us to fulfill our mission to make disciples of all nations in a "new" way. Currently as Valleyview, people come to us – but as the Lord transforms us into Spring Valley – He will be giving us the desire to go out to make disciples.

And there are many ways in which the Lord can do that – not the least of which is hearing about it in sermons and so this morning we're going to hear what the Lord has to say about

one of the nine ways to grow spiritually that we've talked about in our 3 colors of Spirituality tool, and that's the Sharing Style, which is about experiencing God by going out to pass on the grace of God.

Now our scripture passages this morning are good biblical examples of this - 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 God's grace.

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 wanted to confront some punks and put them in their place for disrespecting me.

And even though what I said was technically gracious and non-confrontational – 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. Because as we consider how the Holy Spirit will give us that desire to go out in order to make disciples as we become Spring Valley, it seems obvious that an important part of that is growing in grace.

This is what defines going out – the heart of the Sharing Style brothers and sisters – growing in God's grace and passing on that grace on to others, to the point that we are not content to wait for people to come to us but we'll go to them.

And grace is also the key that 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 it is 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 – bear the result of Adam's fall into sin, and demonstrated that in our own lives by turning 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 – He show us mercy.

Instead, we get something extremely good that we do not deserve - Christ's forgiveness of our sins, AND His own perfect covenant faithfulness with God substituted for our unfaithfulness – that's 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(d), how you don't get what you deserve(d) 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. *(I had this happen to me as well-ticket thrown out by a judge because there was no accuser)*

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, it’s 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 our love has been twisted into a subjective ideal that cherry-picks scripture verses and says *“affirm people as they are, do no harm.”*

Which sounds lovely – except what do you do when someone says you are harming their self-esteem by sharing what we deserve for our sins? 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 the barriers that 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 their style or and 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 used to 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. Chuks even reminded us of that in the AGM presentation by saying that in our weakness – that the Lord is will be strong.

Som we can become strong in the Lord if we simply cooperate with the Holy Spirit's direction, just 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.

And so we look to the Holy Spirit to do that new thing, to give us new desire to go out, to empower us in new ways for that.

We can't just appeal to our sense of duty or obedience or try work ourselves up and get hyped to go out because Pastor Grant sees that we need to do this – instead it is cooperating with the Holy Spirit, surrendering and asking for more of that undeserved Grace in our lives and letting that move us.

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.

And who know – maybe the Holy Spirit will have us resume our old prayer-drives, our Philip Ministry Sundays and welcome-basket drop-offs... or the Holy Spirit will bring about something totally new that will get us going out together and

providing us with opportunities like Philip was given, being directed to go somewhere specific and do something specific that lines up a divine appointment to share the good news about Jesus. As it says in 8:35 that *“Philip began with that very passage of Scripture and told him the good news about Jesus.”*

Brothers and sisters – can you imagine, becoming so full of God’s grace over the next year that we begin to regularly having Spirit-led encounters when we are going out - where we actually get to tell people about the good news of Jesus! Amen?!

Or even just as you are going about your day-to-day business!

Imagine your neighbors asking you to tell them about Jesus!
Imagine your classmates asking you what church is all about?
Imagine going out for a walk and feeling a nudge to take a different route that has you encounter someone that is going through a difficult time and you get to pray for them!?

Imagine what it will be like when you get cut off by a driver who is rushing and speeding through traffic – but you’re just so full of grace that you’re not even mad – you just assume they are dealing with some sort of emergency and graciously say a prayer for them!

Brothers and sisters I pray that this message this morning would get the Holy Spirit working in us to bring us to that point and that... without trying to hype ourselves up by our own strength – we would cooperate and work with the Holy Spirit to foster and encourage that sense of grace.

Maybe the first step you need to do is do a grace check.

Check what spills out of you in instances where someone cuts you off in traffic, when the drive thru gets your order wrong, when you step in the invisible dog pee he left on the kitchen floor... What spills out??

Its like that old question – why did you spill coffee from your cup when someone bumped into you?

We think the answer is because they bumped into me... but the answer is actually that you spilled “*coffee*” because coffee is what was in your cup.

It’s the same with a grace check brothers and sisters. If you’re not spilling grace when you get bumped into then you need a top up or maybe even complete switch out and refill because you’re full of frustration, anger, stress, or whatever else.

And apart from confessing that to God and praying for more grace brothers and sisters, the only way I know how to cooperate with the Holy Spirit on matters like this is to go back to those instances where we know we screwed up and we know what we deserved... and remember them.

Dwell on them for a bit, let yourself feel that conviction and sense of guilt in that situation. Maybe its helpful to tell someone else the story – like how I shared about trying to show up some punks by telling them Jesus loved them when I had no grace to give them at all. I still can feel that sense of incongruity in what I did there...

And I have a whole lot of others things the Holy Spirit has convicted me of over the years – where I have received grace instead of what I’ve deserved.

I’ve found this is one of the best ways to cooperate with the Holy Spirit to remind ourselves of what grace feels like and be refilled with the grace we need in order to be full of God’s grace, so that we can easily share it and pass it on to others.

So take some time this afternoon to do that, remember, reminisce, think about and share some stories with your brothers and sisters about the times where you received grace and how that symbolized the ultimate way in which we have receive God’s grace.

Brothers and sisters – we deserved hell. God has shown us mercy – and given us forgiveness and Christ’s righteousness instead so that we may have eternal life with Him.

May we abound and overflow in the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen!