

Grace is Not Fair

Julie is the primary care giver for her mother-in-law. Kay's dementia makes this trying situation more difficult. As her cognitive function continues to diminish, Kay becomes more dependent and demanding. Through God's grace, Julie keeps giving more. Kay can only receive.

Kay and Julie's relationship has always been superficial. Although Julie and her husband Scott tried to foster the relationship over the years, Kay showed her preference for Scott's brother and his family.

Then things began to change when Scott's father passed. Kay's relationship with Scott's brother became strained, and she began to accept Scott and Julie's invitations to visit them.

During Kay's visits, Julie worked hard to meet her expectations. She cooked the meals Kay requested and took her shopping at all her favorite stores. Every visit left Julie exhausted, but Julie was learning how to extend grace to a woman who treated her with disinterest and selfishness.

Then, about four years ago, the family began to notice significant memory problems in Kay and discovered she was deep in debt. Scott worked through the financial issues. Julie spent hundreds of hours in Kay's house sorting through massive piles, cleaning out, donating, and boxing up. When the task was finished, Kay came to live with Julie and Scott.

Julie's life changed immediately and drastically. Kay doesn't drive, cook, or do laundry. Plus the dementia has intensified her demanding tendencies. Kay doesn't often ask Julie to do something, she tells her. Kay's activities always take priority over Julie's. Kay still shows preference for the other grandchildren. But Julie realizes God is working through this one-sided relationship to refine and transform her, to chisel away her pride, and to foster selflessness.

Julie knows she's in a battle that only God can win.

I struggle daily. Daily God tells me His grace is sufficient. Some days I live in that truth. Some days I don't. On the best days, I cheerfully minister mercy. On the worst days, I ignore acts of mercy I could perform. Most days, I show love in actions while asking God to help me love her more. I don't have the grace to give her within my sinful self. I know every loving act and kind word is actually God's grace flowing through me by the presence and power of the Holy Spirit. I have to ask for that grace every day. Sometimes I try to justify my selfishness. Other times I feel bitterness creep in. But God always reminds me of His great grace to me. He is faithful.

Although Christians have an exceedingly, abundant supply of God's grace it's often difficult to extend that grace to others. Especially to those who don't deserve it or can't extend grace to me in return.

Oh, but wait... that's the point of grace. By definition, "grace" means being kind to those who don't deserve it. To give and do without any expectation that the other person will reciprocate. To show kindness to those who have hurt us and meet the needs of those who will never be able to help us in return.

That doesn't quite sound fair does it? And it isn't. Grace is not fair. Praise God, His grace is not "fair!" Because I surely don't deserve it. And neither do you. Yet God doesn't hesitate to give His grace to us in abundance.

Most of us have relationships in our lives that are totally or mostly one-sided. Let us be people who extend His grace to the underserving. Let's be unfair.

Is there a relationship in your life that is totally or mostly one-sided? If so, how have you been doing with meeting the expectations? In what practical ways can you allow God to use you as a channel for His grace?

This post is adapted from Kathy Howard's new Bible study Lavish Grace: Poured Out, Poured Through, and Overflowing. Lavish Grace is a 9-week journey with the apostle Paul that helps readers discover God's abundant grace for their daily lives and relationships. You can find out more about Kathy, her speaking and writing, and find free resources at www.KathyHoward.org.