New Hope Global Sermon - Pastoral Graces

**Introduction:**

Can you think of the most recent book you have read which is life-changing? I just experienced one.

For several months now I have been reading Pastor Lee Eclov’s blog posts which start, ‘My Dear Shepherds” and end “Be Ye Glad! in *Preaching Today*. Eclov has been a pastor for over 35 years and it is evident that God has given him an all-embracing shepherd’s heart. His insights deeply resonate with me, and so I purchased his 2012 book *Pastoral Graces*. It is subtitled *Reflections on the Care of Souls*. I will review that book this coming week and want to also use it to frame this sermon as we begin July 2021.

Eclov’s bottom line is: “Grace is God’s favor lavished on those who couldn’t get their hands on it by themselves. Meet people with your pockets bulging with grace. . .Grace is the pastor’s foot in the door, the credential on our windshield that lets us park close to people’s hearts” (pp. 45-46, Lee Eclov, *Pastoral Graces*, Moody Press,Moody 2012 pp 45-46) . In his latest blog post he says “God will fortify you. He will give you Spirit-equipped coworkers. He will help you fan into flame the gifts he has given you. He will help you mount up on eagles’ wings. He will kindle your love for the people he has redeemed. So ‘be shepherds of God’s flock that is under your care, watching over them—not because you must, but because you are willing, as God wants you to be.’6 30 21. Eclov’s understanding of God supplying our dispensing grace speaks to how all believers can also shower God’s goodness on one another. That’s our theme. But first, let’s get anchored in the meaning of grace.

**The Meaning of Grace**

In our book *Thinking Outside the Box* Alex and I opened the chapter on Grace with these thoughts:

“What is grace?” Jared Wilson says: “Grace is the most radical idea in the history of the universe and makes Christianity utterly unique. . . . Every other system primarily teaches “things to do”; only Christianity primarily teaches that the things to do are done. . . . The gospel is the good news that our loving God in an act of sheer grace sent his Son Jesus to live the sinless life we should have lived and accept as punishment [for us] the death we should have died.”1

Grace is amazing, not only because it shows the extraordinary love God extends to all the world, but also because it is the basis for transformation through the Holy Spirit in believers’ lives and communities and nations. It is available free of charge for people who are educated and uneducated, famous people and common folk, rich and poor. There are no qualifications needed to receive this grace. As Philip Yancey testifies:

Grace comes free of charge to people who do not deserve it and I am one of those people. I think back to who I was – resentful, wound tight with anger, a single hardened link in a long chain of ungrace learned in family and church. Now I am trying in my own small way to pipe the tune of grace. I do so because I know, more surely than I know anything, that any pang of healing or forgiveness or goodness I have ever felt comes solely from the grace of God. (Alex Zhou and M.L. Codman-Wilson, *Thinking Outside the Box,* William Carey Publishers, 2022, chapter 8: The primacy of Grace).

In Chris Tomlin’s modern adaptation of the hymn Amazing Grace he shouts: “My chains are gone. I’ve been set free. My God my Savior ransomed me. And like a flood His mercy reigns. Unending love, amazing grace.” Grace is all about God’s love which initially was poured out in Christ’s sacrificial death for us, but has continued to shower us with one blessing after another – forgiveness, guidance, protection, comfort, intimacy with Him, answered prayer, His authority over all evil, His presence, His wisdom, His righteousness, His peace, His joy. The list is almost endless.

This is the aspect of grace that is God-given toward all those who follow Him. It’s what makes us alive in Him and a joyful member of His family. But it’s the overflow of that grace that God wants to **pour out of our lives for one anothe**r that is the theme of Eclov’s book. Eclov stresses that these same attributes of grace we have experienced from God are what we need to freely give to one another.

**Pockets bulging with Grace**

He calls it having “pockets full of grace” which we look for opportunities to share. And it’s the myriad ways that he describes this that has touched me deeply this week. So, let’s think about what sharing God’s grace intentionally with others looks like:

*Gracious words*

“Proclaiming grace always starts with the good news of redemption and resurrection. But grace has so much more to tell the redeemed. Gracious words, not always spoken aloud, cancel debts and bandage hearts. Gracious words open cell doors and tell people that their long dark wait has turned into the Lord’s New Year’s Day.” (Eclov, p,28)

One of the most significant Bible verses to me in terms of speaking with grace is Eph. 4:29-32:

29And never let ugly or hateful words come from your mouth, but instead let your words become beautiful gifts[[a](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=eph+4%3A29-32&version=TPT#fen-TPT-10609a)] that encourage others; do this by speaking words of grace to help them.

3 0The Holy Spirit of God has sealed you in Jesus Christ until you experience your full salvation. So never grieve the Spirit of God or take for granted his holy influence in your life.[[b](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=eph+4%3A29-32&version=TPT#fen-TPT-10610b)] 31Lay aside bitter words, temper tantrums, revenge, profanity, and insults. 32But instead be kind[[c](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=eph+4%3A29-32&version=TPT#fen-TPT-10612c)] and affectionate toward one another. Has God graciously forgiven you? Then graciously forgive one another in the depths of Christ’s love. (Passion)

Our words have the ability to tear another down or build him or her up in nurture affirmation and kindness.

A constant steam of words of judgment and criticism wound deeply and create deep scars and chasms of distrust

and distance among people. even in families .Careless words do the same – they sow anger, bitterness, negative

self-worth and often false guilt and shame. This is why the Psalmist prayed: “Set a fortress door before my

lips/God, give me grace to guard my lips from speaking what is wrong (Passion). NLT translates: “Take control

of what I say, O Lord, and guard my lips. “ The Message says “Post a guard at my mouth, God, set a watch at

the door of my lips.” These are wise words of caution since, as James says:

A word out of your mouth may seem of no account, but it can accomplish nearly anything—or destroy it! It only takes a spark, remember, to set off a forest fire. A careless or wrongly placed word out of your mouth can do that. By our speech we can ruin the world, turn harmony to chaos, throw mud on a reputation, send the whole world up in smoke and go up in smoke with it, smoke right from the pit of hell.” James 3:5-6

*The traits of a grace blessed soul*

Eclov goes on to say practically: “Use Scripture to encourage and bless. Give out Bible words like small compasses to disoriented people, like water for runners, like God’s smile for the sad. Have a pocketful of the grace of sympathy and understanding. ‘That must have felt awful’ you might say. “Thank you for being so faithful.” “I would have been so scared. Were you?””I’ve noticed in this trial how you have tried to trust the Lord.” We hand out grace, too, when we remember a visitor’s name, the anniversary of a loved ones death, when we celebrate a good grade on an exam, or cheer for a wedding anniversary.. . Speak grace in the tenderhearted tones of the One who was anointed to comfort all who mourn and provide for those who grieve.. . When Christians speak to each other in psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs our hearts harmonize with the Lord” (Eclov, pp.45,66,77.) May our words always, intentionally, be words of grace that minister help to the hearers.

*Remind people of God’s “benefits package for the soul”*

David, the Psalmist, lists five traits of the grace-blessed soul: God forgives all your sins. He heals all your diseases. He redeems your life from the pit. He crowns you with love and compassion. He satisfied our desires with good things so that your youth is renewed like the eagle’s (Ps.103:1-2). Eclov says: “Helping God’s people lay hold of all these benefits is the work of soul care. I suspect that every need of the harassed and helpless heart is addressed by these five gifts of God’s grace in Christ” (pp.101-102).

Soul care is not just a work for pastors. It is the privilege of each member of the body of Christ as we care for one another. And so, one of the ways we minister grace to one another is to bring Jesus directly into their focus and life situation. Eclov adds: “When Jesus meets the desires of our hearts for love and safety, for meaning here and a home with Him forever; when He give us a family in the church and help in our prayers – when He satisfies all these desires – we are renewed inwardly. It is as if we drink from a fountain of youth” (p. 108).

*Finally, sit at Jesus’ feet for His nourishment*

“Jesus is our manna, our living grace, the bread of heaven. When we don’t get enough of Christ, we get spiritually lightheaded and weak in the knees. . .Jesus nourishes us when we come to sit, like Mary did, at His feet; He nourishes us when we study the Scriptures and pray for strength and wisdom. He feeds us when we worship and come to the Lord’s Table” (Eclov, p.131). And He encourages us as we tell stories of His power, His presence, His victory and His grace to one another. We are made strong as we live together in the Body of Christ.

From this daily strengthening comes the pastoral graces that we pour out to others, whether we are official clergy or committed lay followers of the Lord Jesus. This is God’s vision for all His people, beloved. in our words, our attitudes and our actions. May His grace and peace which He multiplies within us (I Peter 1:2), flow out of us abundantly for others. God makes it happen in small and large ways. That was my encouragement and challenge from Eclov’s book. With the Spirit’s empowerment, we can each live out God’s pastoral graces.

In His Name and for His glory. Amen.

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