



P.O. Box 66540
Albuquerque, NM 87193
505.890.6806
E-mail: irm@liferesource.org
Website: www.liferesource.org

Presentation Transcript
God's Kind of Love
By Bill Jacobs
November 22, 2007

The title of today's presentation is called *God's Kind of Love*.

When Guy Swenson and I produced a seminar on evangelism a few years ago, we used material from an organization called Natural Church Development – NCD. We did this because we knew that, in our tradition, that we had stagnated and really didn't know how to grow anymore. And we knew that there were other Christian groups that *did* know how to grow. So we wanted to learn what they knew. Guy did this study to find the best of the best. And he came up with this organization – Natural Church Development. It was really surprising to me when I realized that they didn't concentrate on evangelism in order to grow. They concentrated on *healthy* congregations. Their idea is that, if your congregation is healthy, it grows.

Okay, that's easy to say, but what does that really mean? What set this group apart from the others that we checked out was, they had surveyed over a million people in all different kinds of churches to find out what all these different Christian groups had in common as far as health. And they came up with eight things that kept coming up over and over and over again. Anybody that understands the mathematics of surveying will realize that when you have a million people, you can get *really* close to what most people think. You know how when there's going to be a presidential election, they survey a few people relative to the two hundred and fifty million people in the country – or two eighty. They can survey two or three thousand people, and they can pretty well tell who's going to win. Same kind of system here, except that they surveyed a million. It's probably up to two by now, because they've really started to gather a lot of momentum.

So what did they learn? What were those eight things? We talked about them in our seminar, but I'm going to rehearse them briefly for you now. The first one was *empowering leadership*. It wasn't just leadership, but it was *empowering* leadership. The second one was *gift-oriented ministry*. We're not talking about ministers. We're talking about service here. That's what ministry is. And it's *gift-oriented*. They talked about *passionate spirituality*. They talked about *functional structure*. They talked about *inspiring worship*. *Holistic small groups*. And then the seventh one was their evangelism

thing – that was *need-oriented evangelism* – where you take care of the *needs* of people. And the last one was *loving relationships*.

It's my plan to talk about all eight of these aspects of congregational health over time. But today I wanted to start with the last one first, which was *loving relationships*. In fact, it may take two presentations to cover everything I want to say about this one. Love is the *heart* of the Christian faith, isn't it?

Let's go to 1 John 4, and verse 7, having said that and think a little bit about what that means. 1 John 4, and verse 7, where John said:

1 Jn. 4:7 – *Dear friends, let us love one another. For love comes from God. Everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God. And whoever does not love, does not know God, because God is love. This is how God showed His love among us: He sent His one and only Son into the world that we might live through Him. This is love: not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins. Dear friends, since God so loved us, we also ought to love another.*

When we say that love is the heart of the Christian faith, love is the *motive*. It's *God's* motive. It's why He does what He does. He does what He does because He loves us. Love is the *reason* He does what He does.

Think about that. He created a world. What kind of a world did He create? Well, it's a beautiful world, isn't it? It's self-healing world. It's self-sustaining. And He created it that way so that we would have a good place to grow up in Him. What else did He do? Well, He sent His Son to die for our sins, because He loves us, doesn't He? So, He's taking care of us. And He gave us the church and the Holy Spirit out of His love to help us become like Him, too, didn't He? So, there are all these things that God does, and they're all motivated by love.

What else is love? Let's go to John 3:16. This is the most famous verse in the Bible. More people know this verse than any other verse in the Bible.

Jn. 3:16 – *For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life.* Not only is love God's motive, but it's the *message* that He's sending out. That *is* the gospel message, isn't it?

What else is it? Let's go to John 12, and verse 32. Jesus said something very interesting here.

Jn. 12:32 – *And I, if I be lifted up from the earth – and that's talking about His crucifixion. And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto Me.* Love is also the *method* that God is using to draw all of us into relationship with Him.

It's the motive. It's the message. And it's the method. You know, there's just nothing like taking care of people, and sacrificing for them, to prove that we care about them, is there? That's how God does it. And He does it because He loves us.

As with all things that are spiritual, the love of God is not really natural to us. If we're to have loving relationships in our congregation, and with others outside our congregation, then we have to understand what the love of God really is. Then we have to learn to grow in it, don't we – how to apply it, how to reflect it to other people.

So today we're going to talk in detail about what Godly love really is. When we finish that, then next time, we'll learn how to apply that in our lives and how to reflect it to other people.

So the first thing that we learned is that *God is love*. So a good question would be, if we want to know how to conduct Godly love, what is God like? What does that mean? God is love. Okay. So the more we learn about Him, the more we're going to learn about love.

Let's go to Romans 1, and verse 20.

Rom. 1:20 – *Since the creation of the world, God's invisible qualities – His eternal power and His divine nature – have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that men are without excuse.*

So we can learn a lot about God from the creation. We can learn about His divine nature from the creation, actually. How can we do that? Let's go back to 1 John again. 1 John 1:5. That verse says:

1 Jn. 1:5 – *This is the message we have heard from Him and declare to you, God is light. In Him there is no darkness at all.* What is it about light that describes God? Well, there's probably a lot of things. I'm going to just focus on one aspect to that.

If we take light and we run it through a prism, what happens to it? We get an array of colors, don't we? There are three colors that are called primary colors, aren't there. What can we learn about that? What does that teach us about God? There are various aspects of God. Some of them are more important than others. Some of them are primary. What can we learn from *that*? One of the things that I think about is, that around God there are a lot of threes. You know, there's three primary colors in light. There's the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. (Now, don't get nervous. I do believe in God the Father. And I do believe in God the Son. And I also believe in the Holy Spirit. That's in the Bible, isn't it? I'm on solid Biblical ground there. Right? Okay. I'm not going to say anymore about it.)

Well, it's interesting, when you look at the book of Psalms, that there are three words that are used over and over and over again in the same verses to describe what God is like. I am *not* going to try to pronounce these three words, but I'm going to spell them for you, so you can write it down in your notes.

The first one is spelled, in English, H-A-E-S-A-E-D. And that word means, at its core, *grace*. It's in the Old Testament. Grace. And it's usually translated *love*, or *lovingkindness* in the Old Testament. There's another one that's spelled A-E-M-U-N-A-H. And that word means, at its root, *truth*. And it's usually translated *faithfulness*. You

know, when somebody always tells you the truth, they're considered faithful. And the third word is spelled S-A-D-A-Q-U-E. And that word means *justice*. And it's usually translated *righteousness* in the Old Testament. Grace, truth, justice – over and over and over again in the same verses of the Psalms, describing what God is like.

Let's look at one of them. Psalm 88:11 and 12.

Psa. 88:11-12 – *Is your love* – and that's the word that begins with H and means *grace* – *declared in the grave*? *Your faithfulness* – there's the word that begins with A and means *truth* – *in destruction*? *Are your wonders known in the place of darkness*? *Or your righteous deeds* – and that word means *justice* and begins with S – *in the land of oblivion*?

If you've got a pretty sophisticated Bible search tool, you can look up these three words and find them in the same two verse span, and you'll turn up a *lot* of them in the book of Psalms. Very, very distinct emphasis on grace, truth and justice.

Let's go to John 1, and verse 17.

Jn. 1:17 – *For the law was given by Moses*. When you think of law, which one of those three terms do you think would fit in with that the best? It would be justice, wouldn't it? *But grace and truth came by Jesus Christ*. So there's those three terms again used in the New Testament. It says that the law was given by Moses, but we know who brought the law, don't we? We know how he got it. That came from God, too. *For the law was given by Moses, but grace and truth came by Jesus Christ*.

In scripture we see these three aspects of God's nature emphasized to us over and over and over again. If God is love, then so are these three things – justice, grace and truth.

I want to show you, today, in a realistic way, how this rather abstract concept works in everyday life – real time. Most of us tend to focus on one or two of these things, and think of them as being part of loving. And yet, if you have only two primary colors, what does the picture look like? People who print...if you leave blue out of a picture, what does it look like? It totally changes it. The point of it is, that if we're going to love the way God does, we have to be balanced in these three things – grace, justice and truth.

Many of us used to be in a fairly large Church of God church that now has shrunk to nearly nothing. Which of these three things do you think that organization was short on? It was grace, wasn't it? We had Passover, but we didn't talk much about grace at all! And we were really big on truth, weren't we? That was really, really important to us. And justice was, too – the law. But we only gave lip service to grace. See, if we're going to love like God loves, then we have to have *all* of them. And they all work together. In our society, and in most of Christianity today, which one of these three things is most clearly associated with love, do you think? Well, it would probably be grace, wouldn't it? Or accepting of other people

I have a friend, who is quite a bit younger than we are. I'm guessing she's probably 25 or 26 and she just had her second child. She is an intern at the clinic I work at. She knows that I am a minister, and she's trying to develop more of a relationship with God and study her Bible more. So we've been talking a little bit about it. She asked me if I'd take her to the Bible bookstore and show her what Bible helps were, because she didn't know. So we did. And then we went out and had lunch. She said, "You know, I'm really having a hard time integrating what I learned in my therapy and what I'm reading about in the Bible." I said, "Well, what do you mean?" And she said, "I was taught in therapy that I was an enabler, and I never did stand up for myself, and I was always doing for other people and I didn't take care of myself at all, and I let people walk all over me. And in the Bible I read where it says that we ought to have love for everybody." And I said, "Well, give me an example where that's a problem for you." And she said, "Well you know, my brother and I have been estranged for quite a few years, and he's going to come visit. And I want it to be a really good visit so that we can kind of get back together again, but I told him what we had planned, and he started cursing at me over the phone!" And she said, "I don't want him to come to my house and talk like that to me in front of my kids – or even to talk to me like that." I said, "But you feel guilty because you're not being loving if you don't let him come." She said, "Exactly." There's that *thing*, isn't it, where she's going to have to decide whether she's going to be just, or gracious, or truthful. You see how it all kind of works? If we leave something out, we've got a problem. She was really missing the element of justice there, where he needs to have his boundary drawn for him and told, "When you're here, you don't talk like that." And that *is* love, isn't it? Because God doesn't like people who talk that way, and so she's really doing him a favor.

I worked with a family some time ago. They had a boy in the ninth grade who wouldn't do his homework. The whole family came in. The little sister was there, and the boy, mom and dad. The parents started telling me that he wouldn't do his work. He was plenty smart enough, he just wasn't doing any homework. I asked *him* what the problem was from his perspective, and he said, "Oh, they're always riding my case all the time. You know, they never cut me any slack. They're always on me." His mother was ex-military. We set up a way that he would be motivated to do his homework on his own. How would you do that? (The whole point of that was so that his parents wouldn't have to ride him.) We found out that he really wanted a cell phone. His parents took him down to the cell phone shop and let him pick out just the one he wanted. Then they set it up on the refrigerator – didn't have it activated – and told him it would be activated and he could have it the first time he brought home a two-week grade report with a higher GPA on it than the two weeks before. Well, he did that right away. He got his phone immediately. He figured up that he could text eighty-six times a day with the plan they bought him. I don't know how long it takes to do eighty-six text messages, but he texted so much his GPA went down – lost his phone. So there he is for two weeks with no phone. Grades went up – got his phone back. This time he realized, "Oh, if I text that much instead doing homework, I'll lose my phone." So he's starting to have to control himself in order to keep the good stuff – just like real life. If I don't make my car payments, somebody's going to come take my truck in the night. That's how it works, right? He's in a situation where he's having to be responsible for himself. He's got his phone and he's keeping his GPA up. He started doing his work.

One day, when he was off school, about noon, he asked his mother if he could go out with his friends that evening. And she did a no-no. I told her *not* to do this, but she just couldn't not do it. She asked him if he'd done his homework. Now she doesn't have to worry about homework anymore. The phone's doing it for her. She doesn't need to say a word about it. All she has to do is take the phone away from him if his grades don't continue to go up. But she asked him if he'd done his homework. He told her he had, but actually he hadn't. Later in the afternoon, before he went out – see, he figured that he could do his homework that afternoon, but he was procrastinating doing it until the very last minute (Do you know about that? I do.) – but he figured it wasn't hard. "I'll just do it this afternoon and crack it out. Then tonight I can go with my friends." While he was doing his homework that afternoon.... By the way, the reason he told her the lie was because he was afraid she would give him a lecture, which is probably exactly what she would have done. He was doing his homework that afternoon, and she came in his room to ask him a question, and saw that he hadn't done it. She got angry with him because he lied about it. So he got angry with her because she was angry with him. When I pointed out to her that she didn't have to be the homework police anymore, because he was now motivated to keep his phone, and he actually *was* doing his homework when she caught him – that's what he was doing.... He was doing the homework that she asked him about. When I pointed all that out to her, she got defensive. She understood the rules and policing. She was short on grace and compassion. She was all about justice, and all about truth, lacking grace.

But what parent comes into a counseling session, and in front of their child, tells a stranger all his faults? It was like he wasn't even in the room while she was telling me all the things that he'd done wrong. It's not gracious. I wouldn't like somebody to do that to me. I wouldn't like my wife to do that to me in front of strangers. Would you? She's the kind of person, that when she sees grace extended to people who have done wrong, it doesn't seem fair. It's pretty important that we understand *how* important it is that we have all three of these things working in unison – working together. And if one gets left out, then the whole thing kind of falls apart. If that lady, who wants to build that relationship back with her brother, isn't willing to hold the line on him and exercise justice, then it's not going to be good for anybody. And if this woman can't be gracious, even though she can hold the line on her son plenty well – she can't be gracious with him – it's not going to work.

Let's ask this question: What *is* darkness? Well, it's the absence of light, isn't it? When there's no light there, then it's dark. Okay, so God is light. And we know that light is made up of three colors. And we've said there are three main characteristics to Godly love, one of which is truth. What's the opposite of truth? You could say lies. You could say deception. The absence of truth. You can see this in the church when people stress the other two things. When grace and justice are emphasized, there's a lack of truth there. You know, the idea that grace covers our sins, making us just without having any part in the process. That omits a huge truth, doesn't it? It omits the fact that we were created for good works. You've got to have it *all* before any of it works.

What's the absence of grace? Well, that would be mercilessness, wouldn't it, where we just don't have mercy for other people. Those are the people that stress truth and justice, but they don't have any compassion or sympathy for other people. I remember the time the Pharisees brought the woman taken in adultery, and they were all focused on the truth of what they caught her doing, and they brought her to Jesus to *judge* her. They wanted justice done, didn't they? But they didn't have any mercy. What did Jesus do? He started writing in the dirt. They think it was the things that those men had done, and they left. And what did Jesus say? He told her to go and to sin no more. So there was still justice there, but there was *mercy* involved, too, that was compassionate.

When you focus on grace and truth – absence of justice – then you have injustice. The absence of justice is injustice. That's people who focus on truth and grace, and often are unable to set just boundaries. I had a lady in my office the other day, with her little nine-year-old boy, and they were both sitting on the couch together, and he was talking to her as though he were her age. There was no mother-son. It was two peers. He's made statements in my presence that she didn't have the right to come in his room, to discipline him.... He's told her that he knows just as well as she did on a lot of different topics. I've heard him say that. What's going on there? She can't hold the boundary on that boy. She's very gracious, but she cannot hold the line on his behavior. You have a situation where justice is absent, and you wind up with injustice.

The more that we move away from injustice to justice, the more that we move away from mercilessness to grace, the more that we move away from deception to truth, then the more we've moving *toward* the light of God and what God is like. Let's take a look at each one of these three aspects of Godly love, but let's look at them one at a time.

Let's look at that word that's translated *justice* in the Old Testament. What is the core value of Godly justice? Well, actually – and this is hard for a lot of people to understand, but... – it seems that the justice of God is primarily a compassionate justice. Let's go to Matthew 25:31. Here's a time of justice that Jesus talked about – when judgment was going to be issued. He said:

M. 25:31 – *When the Son of man comes in His glory, and all the angels with Him, He will sit on His throne in heavenly glory, and all the nations will gather before Him, and He will separate the people one from another, as the shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. And He will put the sheep on His right hand, and the goats on His left. Then the King will say to those on His right hand, "Come, you who are blessed of my Father, take your inheritance – the Kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world. For I was hungry, and you gave Me something to eat. I was thirsty, and you gave Me something to drink. I was a stranger, and you invited Me in. I needed clothes, and you clothed Me. I was sick, and you looked after Me. I was in prison, and you came to visit Me." Then the righteous will answer Him, "Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you? Or thirsty and give you something to drink? When did we see you a stranger and invite you in? Or need clothes and clothe you? When did we see you sick or in prison and go to visit you?" And the King will reply, "I tell you the truth. Whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of Mine, you did for Me." And then He will say to those on His left, "Depart from Me, you who are cursed, into eternal fire prepared for the devil*

and his angels. For I was hungry, and you gave Me nothing to eat. I was thirsty, and you gave Me nothing to drink. I was a stranger, and you did not invite Me in. I needed clothes, and you didn't clothe Me. I was sick and in prison, and you did not look after Me." And they will also answer, "Lord, when did we see you hungry, or thirsty, a stranger, or needing clothes, or sick, or in prison, and did not help you?" And He will reply, "I tell you the truth. Whatever you did not do for one of the least of these, you did not do for Me."

Connected to the idea of being fair, and dishing out justice, is this idea that comes along, that it's very important to take care of people – to take care of people who can't take care of themselves – to help those people who are in need and who have no way of meeting those needs themselves.

Luke 16, verse 19. This is a powerful parable.

Lk. 16:19 – *There was a rich man, who was dressed in purple and fine linen, and lived in luxury every day.* So this guy was the rich man. He wore the Armani suits, and he had the BMW, and he went out to the nicest restaurants, and he had a big house with lots of bedrooms, and a pool table, jacuzzi, swimming pool, and all that. *And at his gate was laid a beggar named Lazarus covered with sores.* He didn't have any of those things. He didn't have a way to make a living. He probably was crippled. That's why he was laid at that the gates. *And he longed to eat what fell from the rich man's table.* It doesn't say he got to eat. It says he longed to eat. *Even the dogs came and licked his sores.* That sounds pretty gross, doesn't it? I was watching a thing on the Discovery Channel the other day about this guy in England that lived with three wolf puppies. He was trying to train them how to be wolves, so he lived with wolves. He couldn't change his clothes or bathe because you can't hide anything from a wolf. If you take time out and go down to Baskin-Robbins and get ice cream, they know that. So he had to do wolf stuff to be a wolf – to be accorded wolf status – so they would listen and be taught by him. So it showed a picture of him chewing meat and letting the wolf puppies eat it out of his mouth. They're slobbering around on him, and he was filthy dirty. He mentioned that he hadn't had a cold or a stomach ache in years doing that. They keep telling us that we use all this antibacterial soap and everything, and all it's doing is destroying our immune systems. Apparently, when the dogs came and licked Lazarus' sores, that was a good thing.

V-22 – *The time came when the beggar died, and the angels brought him into Abraham's side. And the rich man died and also was buried. And in hell, where he was in torment, he looked up and saw Abraham far away with Lazarus by his side. So he called to him, "Father Abraham, have pity on me and send Lazarus to dip the tip of his finger in water and cool my tongue, because I am in agony in this flame."* The thought crossed my mind that I would probably have wanted the fire department there, rather than a drop of water, but...it's a parable. *So Abraham replied, "Son, remember that in your lifetime, you received your good things, while Lazarus received bad things. But now he is comforted here, and you are in agony. And beside all this, between us and you is a great chasm fixed, so that those who want to go from here to you cannot, nor can anyone cross over from there to us."* That man, in his fine house, wearing his nice clothes, driving his fancy

car, eating his good food, probably was not even aware of Lazarus. He may have seen him laying there by his gate, but he probably didn't give it a second thought. There were probably lots of beggars around. He was busy. He had a job to take care of, and money to make, and an estate to manage probably. And it probably never crossed his mind to do anything about it. What's the lesson there for us? We're supposed to be mindful of other people. We're supposed to take care of other people. That *is* the justice of God.

If you read the Proverbs, you see that God makes a lot of threats to us – that if we don't take care of people that can't take care of themselves, He's not going to take care of us. That's fair, isn't it? We're talking justice here, aren't we? And if we *do* take care of other people, then God is going to take care of us. That's fair.

So anyway, he's there, and he says:

V-27 – *“I beg you father, send Lazarus to my father's house, for I have five brothers. Let him warn them, so they will not come to this place of torment.” And Abraham said, “They have Moses and the prophets. Let them listen to them.” He said, “No, father Abraham, but if someone from the dead goes to them, they will repent.”* And then Jesus makes one of the most ironic statements in all the Bible. *And he said, “If they do not listen to Moses and the prophets, they will not be convinced, even if someone rises from the dead.”* Even the resurrection of Jesus Christ isn't going to convince some of us we should take care of the poor.

Has anyone ever heard anyone criticize Mother Teresa? She has been criticized. Do you know why? Even though she went out and took care of so many poor people, she did very little to try to get at the root of their suffering – the social causes of their poverty. I'm not sure that that's a legitimate complaint in her case. I think there is such a thing as spiritual gifts. Maybe she just realized she wasn't good in the political arena.

It seems, that for most churches outside of our church community, Christianity has always understood that we should be interested in and concerned about the causes of misery in the world. That is a very hard thing for humans to do. For some people, it's okay to look at the causes of social injustice in other countries, but not here. Republicans seem to be good at that. We think about why we're in Iraq. The reason given was that they had a terrible leader. For other people, it's okay to be concerned about social injustice here, but not in other countries. Democrats seem to be really good at that. To me, if it's wrong there, it's wrong here. And if it's wrong here, it's wrong there. And injustice is injustice and misery is misery. I just look at the scene today, and it just seems to me that there are just so many things that are done and said without really caring about people, but just using their misery as an excuse to do what we want. Justice is another way to take care of people.

I had a woman come into my office, not too long ago, whose ex-husband wanted to see their child. She knew that her son needed to spend time with him. He was nine-years-old. He had spina bifida and his legs were useless. He had no feeling from his waist down. He had to be catheterized every three hours. Otherwise the urine would back up into his kidneys, and he could get a kidney infection. And his father, when he would take his son,

would never catheterize him. He wouldn't bathe him. Sometimes he'd have him for days. He wouldn't bring him home in time for school or other appointments. He'd let him stay up all night. He'd smoke pot in his son's presence. She knew that because he came home smelling like pot. She was asking me what to do. Should she keep her son away from him? Or should she let him see him, even when he was doing all these terrible things that could really endanger his health and set such a rotten example for him. The little boy needed his father, but he needed his father to be a *responsible* father. I suggested that if she wanted to help her son *and* her ex-husband, she should start documenting all these problems. And when she had enough of it, she should report him to child protective services, and hire a *really* good lawyer to bring pressure to bear against him – not to punish him, but to get him to start acting responsibly on his son's behalf. That would be good for his kid and it would be good for him. Justice is a good thing for everybody. It's one of the aspects of God's love.

Let's look at the area of *truth*. John said that when we walk in the area of truth, we come into the light. Things start to become clear for us. Have you ever noticed that there's a lot that goes unsaid among us? We don't want to upset the status quo. We shy away from confrontation. We don't want to hurt the feelings of other people – so much so, we don't say the things that really need to be said to help that person. Paul's solution to that is found in Ephesians 4, and verse 15. He said:

Eph. 4:15 – *Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will in all things grow up into Him, who is the head.*

Telling other people the truth is a part of love, too. When that lady was in my office – the one who got upset with her kid, when she didn't have to, about the homework – I had to show her that she was overboard on justice and truth, while she lacked grace. Otherwise, I wouldn't really be doing my job as a family counselor. But I had to do it in a way that she could take it in. So I had to be gracious and truthful at the same time with her. And if I didn't do that, then the problem was never going to be resolved. It would probably get worse. He's only in the ninth grade. Imagine what he'd be like at sixteen, if she continues to ride him into the ground all the time. I had to practice graciousness and truth together. We all need to learn how to do that. We need to learn how to tell people the truth, but do it in a way that can be received and accepted.

What would be the core value of truth? Well, it would be trustworthiness. That's how it's translated most of the time in the Old Testament. God's word is trustworthy. He's faithful. He can be depended on. What does it say? God says, "I am the same yesterday, today, and forever." What was true yesterday is true today, and it's going to be true tomorrow. And that's why you can trust Me. You can count on Me. Very important for us, isn't it? We have to learn to tell the hard truth, if we really do love people – something a lot of us would rather not think about.

Let's look at the last one. We're almost through here. Let's look at *grace* – gracefulness. What is the core value to gracefulness or graciousness? Well, it's acceptance. Turn with me to Matthew 18:21.

Mt. 18:21 – *Peter came to Jesus and asked, “Lord, how many times shall I forgive my brother when he sins against me? Up to seven times?” And Jesus answered, “I tell you not seven times, but seventy-seven times.”* You know, be willing to accept people *with* their problems. When you accept somebody seventy-seven times, that means you’re living with them, even though they have a problem. Right? You’re just overlooking the fault and accepting the person. So it focuses on the individual – doesn’t look just on performance, but it looks on the potential of other people.

Have you ever noticed that there are some people that you run into, who are in authority – maybe in a job or a church or at school – and when you’re around them, it makes you feel small and unsure of yourself? Have you ever had that experience? And then there are other people we meet in authority, who are gracious and it causes us to feel like we can accomplish something and like we’ve grown as a result of being in their presence. That’s the difference. Gracious people focus on the individual.

I didn’t realize this was happening, but I think we’ve kind of been sent a single mom’s ministry in my work at the clinic I work at. When most of them come in, they’re in that phase where they’ve been beaten down by their relationship. And a lot of them feel foolish for marrying whom they’ve married, and they feel stupid for putting up with his abuse for so long, and they feel really inept about disciplining their children – because when you’re married to an abusive man, he usually does most of that in a very abusive way. So my job is to help them get over those feelings so that they can be competent. And what they need is grace.

There was one woman I talked to who felt stupid for remarrying her husband – *remarrying* her husband – only to be victimized by him again. I asked her why she remarried him, and she said, “Well, it was the only way he could get into this country.” And I said, “Well, why did you want him in the country?” And she said, “So that my son could see his father.” Oh, well that’s a good reason, isn’t it? Her desire was right anyway. Then she said, “I can’t believe I actually thought he would *be* a good father” – because he turned out to be as much a dud as a father as he was as a husband. I said, “How old were you then?” I could have said right there, “Well, you know, live and learn,” or “Yeah, you really were dumb,” or something like that. But I said, instead, “How old were you then?” And she said, “Twenty-two.” And I said, “And you’re thirty now?” She said, “Yes.” I said, “So when you were twenty-two, you didn’t know as much as you know now. And the fact that you can see it now just shows how much more insightful you are.” All that’s true, isn’t it? I said, “You were barely out of adolescence then. You’re so much more of an adult now. So let’s just be glad you see him for what he is and you don’t have to be tricked a third time.” What those women need is...they’ve seen plenty of justice and truth. What they need is graciousness. They need to be supported and helped while they rebuild themselves.

It strikes me that we’re not only saved by grace, but we need to *live* by it, too. We need to live by it with our children, and with our mate, with people in the church. None of us is perfect. We all need plenty of gracious patience extended to all of us.

Have you noticed in the Bible the way the apostles spoke to people? The different messages that were sent? We're all imbalanced in these three things. Some of us are more gracious. Some of us are more truthful. Some of us are more oriented toward the rules. It's just how it works. So we all need to hear different things to be balanced, don't we? It's not just one message that works.

You think about James. James was talking to people who were respecters of persons. Right? They were not just. So what did he tell them to do? He told them to take care of the poor, which is a major aspect of the justice of God. You know, don't just hang around with the rich people. Take care of the people that are poor.

John. When you read 1st, 2nd and 3rd John, you realize that John is dealing with people who are in the process of succumbing to heretics. What did he tell them to do? He told them to walk in the truth, didn't he?

Paul said to people who wanted to stick to legalism, "All is grace, and grace is for all."

So there's three distinctly differently messages delivered to three distinctly different audiences. Very important that we learn to be balanced in these three things. As we approach perfection in these things, balancing them all three in our life, we approach the white light of God.

Matthew 5:14.

Mt. 5:14 – *You are the light of the world. What do you know! We're supposed to be white light. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden. Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead, they put it on its stand and it gives light to everybody in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven.*

Now that we understand what light means, what Jesus is telling us is that we need to exhibit *Godly* love toward other people. That's what white light is. It's a perfect balance of justice, truth and grace.

At LifeResource Ministries, we not only talk about God's way, but we try to show people how to *live* it. Next time we're going to look at how to approach white light in our lives and let that light shine to other people – how to *apply* justice, how to *apply* grace, and how to *apply* truth in our interactions with other people every day. Be sure to follow this series to learn more about applying all three of these Godly characteristics in all eight aspects of congregational health.