

INTRODUCTION

“Grey’s Anatomy” is one of the most popular television series in America. It won a Golden Globe award a few years ago. The plot follows a group of young physicians who arrive at Seattle Grace Hospital as fresh-faced interns, and then become resident physicians. The show is named after one of the doctors, Meredith Grey, who narrates the story line. If you’ve never seen the show, don’t worry, I can summarize five seasons for you in a few sentences:

Meredith has a crush on Derek, nicknamed Dr. McDreamy, who was married to Addison when he came to Seattle Grace. Derek and Addison divorced because she had a thing going with Derek’s ex-best friend, Mark (nicknamed Dr. McSteamy). Meanwhile, George had a crush on Meredith but instead he married Callie on a whim. But that didn’t last long because George really liked Izzie. In real life, George IS gay, and because Burke, who was Cristina’s guy, commented on that, Burke got fired from the show, which left Cristina without a man until Dr. Hunt showed up with Post-traumatic stress syndrome. Meanwhile Izzie’s dead boyfriend, Denny kept showing up again in the form of a hallucination caused by a brain tumor. But Dr. McDreamy removed the tumor which allowed Izzie and Karev to get married. All of this is supervised by “the chief” Dr. Richard Webber who had an affair many years earlier with Meredith’s mom. Got it?

I actually started watching “Grey’s Anatomy” in the first season, because my daughter and son-in-law were in their medical residency in Columbia, Missouri at the same time and I wanted to get a feel for the kind of life they were living. So after watching a few episodes I asked Jenni if the show was accurate and she said the medical part is pretty accurate but the romantic stuff is pure fiction. She said interns are too busy and tired for any extra-curricular activity!

“Grey’s Anatomy” reflects the twisted values people without a personal relationship with God embrace. The show reminds me that we are surrounded by people here in East Texas who are like the characters on “Grey’s Anatomy.” They bounce from broken relationship to broken relationship and never realize true fulfillment is found only in a personal relationship with God. What is it that Meredith, Izzie, Christine, George and the other characters on “Grey’s Anatomy” are looking for at Seattle Grace Hospital? It’s the middle of the name of their hospital: They are desperately searching for grace.

When Jenni first went to medical school in Galveston, one of her classes was called Gross Anatomy. In order to learn about human anatomy these first year medical students dissected cadavers. Jenni said “gross anatomy” was a good name, because it was pretty gross! When I talk about Grace Anatomy, I don’t want you to get the idea we are going to dissect grace like a medical student dissects a cadaver. One approach to studying a great doctrine like grace would be to read every passage in the New Testament that mentions grace; and there are over 100 of them. But you can’t really take the Bible apart and analyze to appreciate grace any more than I could take this piano apart to appreciate music.

My goal in this message isn’t to give you a definition of God’s Grace. I simply want to give you a description of grace. Since this message is based on “Grey’s Anatomy,” we’ll examine a script written by a physician named Dr. Luke. It wasn’t his story, it was a grace story Jesus told and it’s

found in Luke 15. You may know it as the story of the prodigal son, but I prefer to call it the story of the Graceful Dad. Let's appreciate this story the same way a television show script might be written. There are three scenes in our story of grace.

SCENE I: THE PIGPEN

Our story begins with a young man covered in mud scrounging around in a pigpen competing with the hogs for the few husks of the filthy food available. The Bible says: "After he had spent everything, there was a severe famine in that whole country, and he began to be in need. So he went and hired himself out to a citizen of that country, who sent him to his fields to feed pigs. He longed to fill his stomach with the pods that the pigs were eating, but no one gave him anything. When he came to his senses, he said, 'how many of my father's hired men have food to spare, and here I am starving to death! I will set out and go back to my father and say to him: Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son; make me like one of your hired men.' So he got up and went to his father." (Luke 15:14-20)

A popular technique for television is the flashback, so this scene begins with the starving son sitting in the slime and mud. Suddenly his mind flashes back to a time when he was clean and well fed. He hears his mother calling everyone to supper and he remembers his dad saying grace over the sumptuous meal. He also recalls how restless he felt and how he finally told his dad he wanted his share of the inheritance. With his pockets full, he left home and headed to the bright lights of the city. He spent all the money on wild living and then he found himself broke and hungry and he ended up in the pigpen.

Now, let's push the pause button on the story and have a grace break. There are a lot of great books written about grace. Chuck Swindoll's *The Grace Awakening* is excellent. But my favorite book about grace is *What's So Amazing About Grace?* by Phillip Yancey. I want to share some of the things I learned about grace and "ungrace" from reading his book.

Yancey says we all grow up in the world of "ungrace." He created that word up as the antithesis of grace. Because we live in this world of ungrace it is very difficult for us to accept the different rules of God's grace. Here's the principle: In the natural world of ungrace, we earn approval by our achievements. It's true in school. Kids are put in advanced classes if they test higher, and they're slotted in remedial classes if they test lower. School is all about pass/fail—make the grade. Achieve and you advance, and if you don't achieve you don't advance. It's *quid pro quo*—something for something.

When I was in the first grade I can remember the pride I felt because I was put in the advanced reading circle. We were the fast readers. Our book was all about Dick and Jane and their dog, Spot and their cat Puff. We'd sit in a semicircle around the teacher and each of us would read a page aloud. "See Spot run? Run Spot run." Well, I was so into the story that I read ahead just to see what would happen to Spot and Puff. When it came time for me to read, I was several pages ahead and didn't know the place, and the teacher thought I couldn't keep up, so guess what? I lost my place and got put back in the slow readers group.

From the time we are children we learn the cycle of performance and reward. The world of ungrace is all about ranking and rewards for achievement. We grow up and that's the way the business world works. If you work you get paid. If you don't work...well, it used to be that you didn't get paid. But like the fast readers and the slow readers, it's all about achievement. If you produce you get the corner office with the windows. Achievement is rewarded. Every year *Forbes Magazine* ranks the 500 richest people in the world. Nobody knows the names of the 500 poorest people in the world. Because we all live in this world of ungrace it's hard for us to make the transition into the world of grace.

Phillip Yancey describes the world of ungrace this way: "Like city-dwellers who no longer notice the polluted air, we breathe in the atmosphere of ungrace unawares. As early as preschool and kindergarten we are tested and evaluated before being slotted into 'advanced', 'normal', or 'slow' track ... Test papers come back with errors – not correct answers – highlighted. All this helps prepare us for the real world with its relentless ranking, a grown-up version of the playground game 'king of the hill'." (*What's So Amazing about Grace?* p. 36)

Meanwhile, back in the pigpen, our boy is wallowing in ungrace. Ungrace is an arrogant actor who crosses his arms and says indignantly: You get what you deserve! When Jesus told this story His Jewish listeners probably said, "Oy! The kid got exactly what he deserved! What a schmuck to disgrace his family and waste his father's money. He lived like a pig; let him eat like a pig!" And when we hear this story for the first time, a sense of justice rises up in us and we want to say, "Well, he got what he deserved! He made his bed, so now let him sleep in it!" Even the son believed that. He said, "I am no longer worthy to be called your son. I deserve to be a slave."

Did you grow up in home where ungrace ruled? Did you feel the best way to get one or both of your parents to approve of you was by your performance? Did you feel that if you made better grades and kept your room clean your parents would love you more? Or maybe you felt unloved and you convinced yourself you didn't deserve to be loved as much as one of your brothers or sisters? We live in a world of ungrace. That's scene one. Now let's move to:

SCENE II: THE REUNION

When the son left home, I imagine he was literally running toward the bright lights of the city filled with anticipation of all the thrills he would enjoy. The money was burning a hole in his pocket. But the journey back was no pleasure trip. He was broke, hungry, dirty, and exhausted. Step after agonizing step he rehearsed his speech. "Father I've sinned against heaven and against you. I'm no longer worthy to be called your son. Just make me a slave." He was hoping for a sliver of mercy: Just hire me as a servant. Let's pick up the words of Jesus in Luke 15:20: "But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion for him; he ran to his son, threw his arms around him and kissed him. The son said to him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son.' But the father said to his servants, 'Quick! Bring the best robe and put it on him. Put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet. Bring the fattened calf and kill it. Let's have a feast and celebrate.'"

Here's the principle: In the supernatural world of God's grace, He accepts us because of His

loving nature. What the son deserved was for his father to say, "I told you that you were making a mistake! But now you've have disgraced me and your family. I disowned you when you left, so turn around and get out of here!" Or at best he deserved to be demoted to a servant's status with his father saying, "Okay, I'll let you work for me until you have paid back every single penny you owe me." That's how the world of ungrace works.

But his father didn't accept him because the son deserved it, he did it because it was the father's nature to be loving, graceful, and forgiving to his son. Ungrace says: You get what you deserve. But grace opens its arms wide and says with compassion: You get what you need not what you deserve! The son deserved to be rejected, but he needed to be accepted.

My favorite part of the story is that the father saw him at a great distance and RAN to meet him. This wasn't a coincidence that the father just happened to glance down the road one evening. No, from the day the son had departed, the father had been hoping for and looking for the return of his son. And when he saw him, ran to embrace him with his grace. This is the greatest two word description of God's grace in the Bible: He ran. He hugged and kissed his rebellious son before the son said one word! Remember the son had been working in the pig pen. He looked and smelled awful, not exactly the kind of person you want to hug and kiss! The father could have said, "Oh, you're back. Good. Clean yourself up before you come into this house!" But instead, the father accepted him in his filthy condition. That's the meaning behind the invitation song we used to sing, "Just as I am."

The son started his rehearsed speech, but the father didn't even let him finish. He interrupted him and said, "Let's have a party!" This story is full of irony. The son left looking for a big party, and he found the big party was actually at his father's house. He left looking for steak on his plate, and he found that the fatted calf was back at his father's house. He left looking to find sharp clothes to wear to impress the ladies, and he found that the robe, the sandals, and the ring was back at his father's house. All the things he went searching to buy, his father gave to him as a free gift.

What kind of God do you believe in? Is He a stern God of justice who demands your very best performance if you want Him to give you a thumbs up? Jesus teaches us that God is the kind of Father who not only offers us grace, He runs to give it to us, and then He embraces us even though we're still covered in dirt.

In his short story, *Capital of the World*, Ernest Hemingway wrote about a father in Spain who had a son named Paco. Because of his son's rebellion, Paco and his father were estranged. The father was bitter and angry with his son, and kicked him out of the house. After years of bitterness, the father's anger ended and he realized his mistake. He began to look for Paco, with no results. Finally, in desperation, the father placed an ad in the Madrid newspaper. The ad read, "PACO, ALL IS FORGIVEN. MEET ME AT THE NEWSPAPER OFFICE AT 9AM TOMORROW. LOVE, YOUR FATHER." Paco is a rather common name in Spain, and Hemingway wrote that when the father arrived the next morning, there were 600 young men—all named Paco—waiting and hoping to receive the forgiveness of their fathers."

Millions of people are searching for love and forgiveness, and God is offering it. Have you

wandered away from God? Do you feel estranged from Him? He is ready to welcome back into His arms. Not because you deserve it but because you need it. That's grace.

Now if I had been writing the script I would have ended it with the party, and the credits would roll. But Jesus added another twist to the plot. That leads us to:

SCENE III: THE COMPLAINER

As the older brother was coming in from the fields, he heard the music and smelled the barbeque. He asked a servant what was happening. When he learned his younger brother had returned he got angry and started complaining. Let's read the words of Jesus found in Luke 15:28-32: "The older brother became angry and refused to go in. So his father went out and pleaded with him. But he answered his father, 'Look! All these years I've been slaving for you and never disobeyed your orders. Yet you never gave me even a young goat so I could celebrate with my friends. But when this son of yours who has squandered your property with prostitutes comes home, you kill the fattened calf for him!' 'My son,' the father said, 'you are always with me, and everything I have is yours. But we had to celebrate and be glad, because this brother of yours was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found.'"

The lesson we learn from the older brother is that we are faced with a choice. We can choose to live in the world of grace or we can remain in the world of ungrace. The father was full of grace but the older son crossed his arms and stubbornly refused to enter into the party.

Which world are you living in? There are at least three dangers you face when you live in the world of ungrace:

(1) UNGRACE will harden your heart toward others

His father had forgiven the son, but the older brother couldn't. He still lived in the world of ungrace where you get what you deserve. Did you pick up on the animosity in his attitude toward his brother? He couldn't even bring himself to say "my brother." He said, "This son of yours." And he said his brother had spent all his father's money on prostitutes. That detail wasn't part of the story. Maybe the older brother was projecting, but he was making the behavior of his brother sound worse than it was. He was embellishing his faults.

(2) UNGRACE will blind you to the true nature of God

He said, "All these years I've slaved for you." That's a performance-based statement. He was a son but he worked like a slave to win his father's acceptance. His view of his father was, "This man will love me if I work hard for him." When he learned his father didn't play by the rules of ungrace, he became angry.

The older son deserved to be rebuked for not rejoicing. The father could have said, "Son, that's a stupid attitude. Stop being childish and selfish and march yourself in there and give your brother a hug!" But instead of giving him what he deserved, the father gave him what he needed—grace. He said, "Son, from the moment you were born I have loved you. You didn't earn my love by

your hard work. I love you simply because you are my son." That's what God is saying to you. I love you. I have always loved you. You can't earn my love and you'll never deserve it. I love you because it is my nature to love you. When you live in the world of ungrace you get a distorted picture of God.

(3) UNGRACE will make you miss the blessings the Father offers

The pouting son said, "You've never even killed a goat for me and he gets the fatted calf?!" The dad said, "Son, it's all yours! If you had wanted the fatted calf or a young goat, or an old chicken, all you had to do was ask me." You see, the complaining son thought if he worked hard enough he could earn a goat feast, when all he had to do was accept it as a gift.

People who are used to living in the world of ungrace sometimes have a hard time accepting the free gift of eternal life. They think it's too easy. Like the older brother, they think if they slave away and work hard and do good and be good that they can earn it or pay for it. You can't. It's already been paid for. The only decision you have to make concerning the grace of God is whether or not you will accept it as a free gift.

CONCLUSION

A few days ago Rickey Henderson was inducted into baseball's hall of fame. He holds the major league record for the most stolen bases and most runs scored. He was a gifted athlete but he'll admit he wasn't a financial genius. For instance, when he signed with Oakland Athletics in 1979, he received a \$1 million signing bonus. And that was back when a million dollars was a million dollars. He received the million-dollar check in the mail, but instead of cashing it, he framed it and put it on his wall to remind himself that he was now a millionaire. Almost a year later the bookkeeper for the team realized his books weren't balancing—he was off by a million dollars. He traced the error and discovered Rickey hadn't cashed his check. He contacted him and asked him about it and Rickey said, "It's hanging here on my wall." The bookkeeper said, "Rickey, cash the check, deposit it and then you can hang the cancelled check on the wall." And that's what Rickey did. He wasn't a millionaire just because he had been given the check. He had to cash it.

When I heard that story I thought about God's grace. Can you imagine receiving a million-dollar check and not cashing it? Well, God has offered us a trillion-dollar check called grace. And there are many people who talk about grace and sing about Amazing Grace but they never cash God's grace check.

Salvation is a gift, but it isn't free. Jesus paid it all. Someone said that grace stands for God's Riches At Christ's Expense. The Creator of the Universe loves you so much He has already given the very best He has to purchase your forgiveness. Now it's a free gift that He offers to you. Will you accept His grace? Will you cash the check?

That's the first episode of the Gospel According to TV. By the way, do you want me to tell you what's going to happen in the future on "Grey's Anatomy?" Here's the scoop: It's going to be cancelled after a few more seasons—every television show eventually is. So don't base your

future on "Grey's Anatomy." But Grace Anatomy will change your life for eternity.

OUTLINE

SCENE I: THE PIGPEN

In the natural world of ungrace, we earn approval by our achievements.

Ungrace (says indignantly): You get what you deserve!

SCENE II: THE REUNION

In the supernatural world of God's grace, He accepts us because of His loving nature.

Grace (says with compassion): You get what you need not what you deserve!

SCENE III: THE COMPLAINER

We can choose to live in the world of grace or the world of ungrace.

UNGRACE will

- (1) Harden your heart toward others
- (2) Blind you to the true nature of God
- (3) Make you miss the blessings the Father offers



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For the Joy...
Pastor David Dykes