

LESSON NINE: THE FACE OF GRACE

In his book titled, *What's So Amazing about Grace*, Philip Yancey writes: “*Grace means there is nothing we can do to make God love us more*—no amount of spiritual calisthenics and renunciations, no amount of knowledge gained from seminaries and divinity schools, no amount of crusading in behalf of righteous causes. *And grace means there is nothing we can do to make God love us less*—no amount of racism or pride or pornography or adultery or even murder. Grace means that God already loves us as much as an infinite God can possibly love (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan Publishing House, 1997), 70. God’s face is truly the face of grace.

PRAY: Gracious Father, look upon us with Your unflinching grace. You see all our evil, imperfections, and shortcomings. There is nothing we can do to gain Your favor. Help us to seek Your face as we cast ourselves upon Your throne of grace and beg for mercy. Hear us for Jesus’ sake. Amen.

INTRODUCTION: Bob Olmstead of Reno, Nevada, tells of the experience of colleague Bill Welsh, a pastor in Desert Hot Springs, California. Members of Welsh’s congregation had a child who was subject to sudden seizures. These seizures were violent and painful, not only for the child but also for the parents and those who witnessed the child’s suffering.

The father and the child would come to church regularly and the father’s practice was to hold the child. One Sunday morning in the midst of worship, the child was seized [and] writhed painfully...The father lifted him caringly, carried him ...to the back of the sanctuary, where he stood still rocking the child tenderly, speaking to him gently until finally the seizure relented...There was no sign of embarrassment or frustration on the father’s face, only love for the hurting child. And then Welsh said, “In that moment, while I was preaching, I was preached to. I heard God speak to my heart and say, ‘That’s the way I love you through your imperfections. I’m not embarrassed to have people know that you are My child.’”
—Bob Olmstead, Reno, Nevada, 30 August, 1992.

BIBLE BASE: Read Luke 23:32-43.

DISCUSS: (The following questions are for discussion. You may fill in the answers in the space provided.)

Why was Jesus crucified with two criminals?

Were the criminals nailed to the cross as Jesus was?

How did Jesus display His face of grace to the Roman soldiers?

How did Jesus show grace while suffering?

Why did Pilate's inscription declare Jesus the King of the Jews?

Why did one of the criminals rebuke the other criminal?

What did the criminal mean when he asked Jesus to remember him when He comes in His Kingdom?

CHALLENGE: Develop a strategy for your group to invite people to come to your study whom you would not ordinarily invite.

CLOSING THOUGHTS: With our hand clenched in a fist we cannot so much as pick up an orange or a boiled egg from the breakfast table. With a fist we cannot open a water faucet to wash the dishes or our face. Cooking and laundering cannot be done with hands closed in a fist. In terms of everyday human operations our fists are singularly ineffective. We use our open active hands to do almost everything that we do. The fist, so unpractical and ineffective, is a symbol of power. The world lives under the shadow of two huge fists, but its healing is in the open, nail-pierced hands of Christ.

Jesus reaches out to us with hands painfully open; He could not have been crucified with a clenched fist. Thus God is 'open,' not ideologically fixed. This God is not afraid of 'losing face.' This God waits patiently, ready to respond to human response... God rules over history but does not monopolize history. Here is suggested the painful openness of God. Our history is touched by the hands of Christ painfully open.

—Kosuke Koyama, "The Hand Painfully Open," *Lexington Theological Quarterly*, 22 (1987), 33 & 36.

CLOSING PRAYER: Lord God, keep us in Your grace. You have opened Your hands to receive us just as we are. Empower us to seek Your face always and use us as Your instruments to communicate Your grace to others. In Jesus Name we pray. Amen.