

Grace Transforms Everything

by Sean Michael Lucas

In our town, a church just went through a rebranding effort as part of their relocation to a new building in a different section of town. Their logo and signage are beautiful and well conceived. One sees their stickers on cars everywhere. And their tagline is memorable: “Faith changes everything.”

As I’ve thought about that tagline, on one hand, it is completely appropriate. Faith in Jesus Christ does change everything about the way we see the world, the way we engage our families, the way we live out our callings.

And yet, I suspect, based on this congregation’s theological heritage, faith is viewed as a decision that the individual makes to follow Jesus. Thus, they emphasize evangelistic outreach, gearing their ministry toward bringing people into contact with Jesus so that they might make a life-changing decision for Him.

While I appreciate this church’s evangelistic zeal, I wonder whether this is the best emphasis. What would happen if instead of saying that “faith changes everything” we claim that “grace transforms everything”?

Over against the moralism that is characteristic of so many evangelical churches, I’d suggest that the truly distinctive message we have as the church is this message of God’s grace that “makes beauty out of ugly things” — indeed, grace transforms everything.

The old slave-trader turned hymnwriter and preacher, John Newton, noted toward the end of his life: “My memory is nearly gone, but I remember two things: that I am a great sinner and that Christ is a great Savior.” No wonder Newton wrote the great hymn “Amazing Grace.” For this is the heart of the gospel of grace: we are great sinners and Christ is a great Savior.

The Bible speaks of our sin and sinfulness in wide-ranging ways: we are deceitful ([Jer. 17:9](#)); dead ([Eph. 2:1](#)); dirty ([Isa. 1:18](#); [64:6](#)); wayward ([Isa. 53:6](#)); lawless ([1 John 3:4](#)); disobedient ([1 Tim. 1:9](#)); ungodly ([Rom. 4:5](#); [5:6](#)); ignorant, hardened, and alienated from God’s life ([Eph. 4:17–18](#)). We fall short of God’s glory ([Rom. 3:23](#)); we suppress God’s truth (1:18); and we act out in sinful ways (1:21–32; [Eph. 4:19](#)). We deserve God’s wrath for our sin and disobedience, and we are already condemned ([John 3:17–18](#); [Eph. 2:3](#)).

But God, because He is rich in grace, chose to save some undeserving sinners — He united us together with Christ, made us alive with Him, raised us with Him from our dead condition, and seated us with Him in the heavenly places ([Eph. 2:4–7](#)). He has granted us faith to trust in Jesus ([Eph. 2:8–9](#)), declared us righteous ([2 Cor. 5:21](#)), clothed us with Christ ([Rom. 13:14](#)), and gifted us with the Holy Spirit ([Eph. 1:13–14](#)). He empowers us to live in ways that please Him ([Eph. 4:25–5:2](#); [Gal. 5:13–26](#)). We now can say no to our sin and live godly lives because God has shown us grace ([Titus 2:11–14](#)).

And this grace, this undeserved favor, is not just for the beginning of our Christian lives, but also for every moment of every day of our discipleship. We come again and again to this fountain of grace, trusting in our union with Christ ([Col. 3:1–4](#)), to putting to death our sin and living in the light of what is true about us ([Rom. 6:11–13](#); [8:14–15](#); [Col. 3:5–16](#)).

A life lived rooted in God's grace shown to us in Jesus is transformed. Our walk with Christ is transformed — no longer are we driven by mere duty, but by delight in this Son of God who loved us and gave Himself for us ([Gal. 2:20](#)). We engage in personal, family, and corporate worship in order to enjoy communion with God through Christ by the Spirit — we're greedy for delight in God.

Relationships with others are transformed — since we're not driven to perform to please God or others, we do not fear losing the Father's smile, but are freed to risk ourselves for others ([Zeph. 3:17](#)). Even more, we can be honest about ourselves, which means defensiveness is gone, replaced by authenticity, confession, repentance, and forgiveness.

Our callings in this world are transformed — this world is more than an evangelistic opportunity or a turbulent sea in which we've been given a lifeboat to save some. Rather, this is God's good world ([Ps. 24:1](#)) in which He has called us to serve as signs and agents of God's coming new creation ([Isa. 65:17–25](#); [2 Cor. 5:17](#)). Work, parenting, community involvement, engagement with art, music, film — all take on new meaning because we take Christ with us into those arenas to show what the new world looks like.

Even the ugly parts of life have grace-laden possibilities because Christ is Lord over the whole world and is making all things new ([Rev. 21:5–6](#)). As agents of God's grace, we live out of the overflow of undeserved favor, extreme gratitude, and passionate communion with Jesus — which moves us into life's ugliness to see God's beauty emerge.

Here is a manifesto for the church's ministry, a huge vision of God's purpose in this world: In Jesus, God shows grace to undeserving, ugly sinners as part of God's own mission of transforming this world so that it will reflect His glory. And so, what changes when the church has a grace-centered ministry? Everything!