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Justifying Grace – Barbara Wood Salyers

Please turn to page 48 in your purple worship book and join me in praying the Prayer to the Holy Spirit.

*Come Holy Spirit, fill the hearts of your faithful and kindle in us the fire of your love. Send forth your Spirit, and we shall be created. And you shall renew the face of the earth. O God, who by the light of the Holy Spirit did instruct the hearts of the faithful, grant that by the same Holy Spirit we may be truly wise and ever enjoy your consolations. Through Christ our Lord. Amen.*

**[^]** There was once a velveteen rabbit, and in the beginning, he was really splendid. He was fat and bunchy as a rabbit should be; his coat was spotted brown and white, he had real thread whiskers, and his ears were lined with pink sateen. On Christmas morning, when he sat wedged in the top of the Boy’s stocking, with a sprig of holly between his paws, the effect was charming. There were other things in the stocking… but the Rabbit was quite the best of all. For at least two hours the Boy loved him, and then Aunts and Uncles came to dinner, and there was a great rustling of tissue paper and unwrapping of parcels, and in the excitement of looking at the new presents the Velveteen Rabbit was forgotten.

The name of this talk is **[^]** Justifying Grace, and my name is **[^]** Barbara Wood Salyers.

In the Prevenient Grace talk you heard how God is wooing, pursuing and nudging us to the time when we can wholeheartedly accept the splendid gift of a **[^]** personal loving relationship with God. **[^] Justifying Grace is when [^] we accept that gift, when [^] we accept the relationship with God, when [^] we say yes to God’s offer.** It is not accepting the gift and loving it for at least two hours and then being distracted and forgetting it. Rather it is when we embrace the gift of love, when we allow it to become part and parcel of us. When the gift and when we become real.

**[^]** “What is real?” The Velveteen Rabbit asked the old, wise and experienced toy of the nursery, “Does it mean having things that buzz inside you and a stick-out handle?”

“Real isn’t how you are made,” said that wise old toy, **[^]** “It is something that happens to you when you realize that you’re loved. **[^]** It is when someone loves you for a long, long time, not just to play with, but really loves you; then you become Real.”

God’s gift of unwavering love has always been, is now, and always will be. Yet we see this beautiful gift and sometimes we don’t unwrap it. Or we unwrap it yet forget the gift and play with the box. Or we play with the gift for a little while and then become distracted. A lot of us humans don’t know how to accept gifts. We are cautious, fearful, and unaccepting. We are God’s people with the freedom to choose the open package and allow ourselves to become real. Oh, we have a multitude of reasons and excuses not to open the box or allow ourselves to become real.

**[^ blank screen]** But we are not alone. We follow in the long-standing tradition. Moses stood before the burning bush stammering out his inadequacies; Jonah headed in another direction; Jeremiah said, “Not me God—I’m too young.”. Paul was a vindictive hate-filled persecutor; the disciples were a ragged group of people who never quite understood all that they were being taught and given even with the great giver and teacher right there in their midst.

What did God see in Moses or Jonah or Jeremiah? What did Jesus see in Simon Peter and Andrew, James and John? What does God see in (names of those on team)? God sees God’s own creation. God Knows what we can be. God loves us and offers us the transforming gift of grace. The chance of accepting that love and becoming “real”.

Justifying Grace is when we accept that gift, the relationship that God offers to us.It is not easy. We think we have to be perfect to receive that perfect love. We are afraid of the price we might have to pay to become real.

**[^]** “Does it hurt to be real?” asked the rabbit.

“Sometimes,” answered the experienced toy, for he was always truthful. **[^]** “Generally, by the time you are Real, most of your hair has been loved off and your eyes drop out and you get loose in the joints and very shabby. **[^]** But these things don’t matter at all, because once you are Real you can’t be ugly except to the people who don’t understand.”

When we **[^]** accept that we are real **[^] it is an act of faith, not a work though which we merit the relationship.** In **Romans 3:21-26** we read:

***“God’s way of putting people right with God’s self has been revealed. It has nothing to do with the law… God Puts people right through their faith in Jesus Christ. God dose this to all who believe in Christ because there is no difference at all: everyone has sinned and it is far away from God’s saving presence. But by the free gift of God’s grace all are put right with God through Jesus Christ who sets them free.”***

**[^] We are free to repent of our sins and believe the Good News** to trust in Jesus to make us whole. No longer do we have to rely on our own strength. But we can have the freedom to commit ourselves to the power and guiding of Christ Jesus. **[^] Our acceptance, our realness, our faith, not our works, is the foundation in our relationship with God**. We read in **Galatians 3:6-9:**

***“Consider the experience of Abraham; as the scripture says, ‘He believed God, and because of his faith God accepted him as righteous.’ You should realize then, that the real descendants of Abraham are the people who have faith. The scripture predicted that God would put the Gentiles right with Godself through faith. And so the scripture announced the Good News to Abraham: ‘Through you God will bless all humankind.’ Abraham believed and was blessed; so all who believe are blessed as he was.”***

When we have faith, accept the gift of love and forgiveness through Jesus Christ, **[^] we become “real”.** We know that God loves us even with loose joints and hair falling out. God is active in our process of unwrapping the splendid gift. **[^] God is active in our acceptance.** God is active in opening our eyes to see that we are “real”.

I’d like to suggest four ways that God is active:

1. **[^] God appeals to our intellect. (Repeat)**

**Ephesians 4:13** suggests that **[^]** when we come together in study, sharing our knowledge, we will come to Christian maturity. I would suggest that reading the Bible alone will never lead to the relationship with God that will come by studying with other seekers. God appeals to our shared intellect.

1. **[^] God touches our emotions. (Repeat)**

The Boy sat up in bed and stretched out his hands and said, “Give me my Bunny! He isn’t a toy. He is Real!”

When the little Rabbit heard that, he was happy. He was Real. The Boy himself had said it.

That night the Velveteen Rabbit was almost too happy to sleep, and so much love stirred in his little sawdust heat that it almost burst. And into his boot-button eyes that had long ago lost their polish, there came a look of wisdom and beauty.

**[^]** We can respond to our emotions and enthusiasm as long as we don’t depend on these feelings to maintain our relationship. For it does sometimes hurt to be real. God touches our emotions in our pain and in our joy.  
{Personal Experience}

1. **[^] God does not dictate our response. (Repeat)**

God gives us the beautiful gift but doesn’t force us to unwrap or even play with the gift. **[^]** It is a free decision of ours. Unwrapping and opening and making the gift ours is an act of our will.

{Personal Experience}

1. **[^] God’s unconditional love which makes this relationship possible. (Repeat)**

This is **[^]** the love that allows us to be real. **Romans 5:8** says, ***“But God shows love for us in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.”*** Not perfect, and yes, even shabby. While we were yet sinners… we continue into grace, because of God’s grace we can be shabby. In fact, often when we are down and feel ugly we recognize new depths of God’s love and acceptance. When we accept God’s grace our whole life changes; we take on a new perspective. And we can’t be ugly except to people who don’t understand.

**[^ blank screen]** {Personal Experience}

As we **[^]** unwrap this fine present of God’s love and allow ourselves to become real, we can discover daily ways of loving God in all things as **[^] we practice the disciplines of prayer, worship, scripture reading, and meditation**. We discover ways of living for God by looking at Jesus and other Christians.

My friends, **[^] one of the ways people are moved to the point of accepting this gift of grace is by the outpouring of love and acts of love of other Christians. This kind of [^] God-love is called agape love.**

Hear the words of my friend as he writes about how the agape love touched and changed his life: “I had my fire go out in the area of love and service to others as a result of some misfortune in some personal relationships. **[^ blank screen]** I had pulled back from reaching out to others because I didn’t want to get hurt again. But God once again showed me that we should not turn from doing service to him when we are hurt by others. People hurt us, not God. Once again, I was shown how very important my daily personal time with God and his word is to my happiness. I forgot my daily devotions and praise to the Lord. I forgot, He did not. I changed, He remained the same.”

“Seeing and feeling all the love from people that I didn’t even know, filled me again with the love for others that I had given away.”

“God gives of us blessings and gifts. The Lord gave me people as my blessing. He gave them to me to love and minister to. He taught me to look into their eyes when I speak with them and this sometimes tells me more than what they are saying to me. I was told to care for and love people.”

“I had to get back to serving, especially when I am not seen in service by others. Once again to serve for the sheer joy of serving and not to promote myself or some good act that I might happen to be doing.”

During this Encounter, there are Christians who are loving you in sacrificial ways by praying, serving, and other acts of love- so when you experience this love you will know how much God loves you. These communities of love have sent letter and other forms of communication to let you know about this form of love- agape.

{Read letters here}

**[^]** The wise old toy answers you. When someone loves you for a long, long time, not just to play with but really love you, then you become Real. And my friends, **[^]** you are REAL.

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**[ LEAVE THE HAND CROSS ON THE LECTERN ]**

Scripture References

Romans 3: 21-26

Galatians 3: 6-9

Ephesians 4: 13

Romans 5: 8

Book References

Margery Williams Bianco, *The Velveteen Rabbit*.