

“Heart Refreshers”

Philemon 1:3-7 & 20

Pastor James York

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Have you ever marveled at the ripple effect? My favorite is when a lake is smooth as glass and reflects the landscape around it, then I toss in a pebble and ripples go out in ever widening circles making the landscape reflection dance. It is quite remarkable that a single pebble can change the surface of an entire lake.

Each of us can change the world by sharing love. God has given you gifts that, when shared, refresh people's hearts.

Philemon 1:3-7 & 20 NLT “May God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ give you grace and peace. I always thank my God when I pray for you, Philemon, because I keep hearing about your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love for all of God’s people. And I am praying that you will put into action the generosity that comes from your faith as you understand and experience all the good things we have in Christ. Your love has given me much joy and comfort, my brother, for your kindness has often refreshed the hearts of God’s people. Yes, my brother, please do me this favor for the Lord’s sake. Refresh my heart Christ.”

Pastor Eugene Peterson compares today's scripture with the ripple effect writing, “Every movement we make in response to God has a ripple effect, touching family, neighbors, friends, community. Belief in God alters our language. Love of God affects daily relationships. Hope in God enters into our work. They spill out and make history.”

Paul begins his letter, “Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.” All 13 of Paul's letters, both of Peter's letters, 2 of John's letters and Jude's letter all begin with, “Grace to you and peace from God”. That's 18 of 22 New Testament letters. You have probably noticed that I greet you at the beginning of worship with, grace, mercy and peace to you in the name of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. We often pass the peace in worship.

Grace is the free gift of God's love. Grace is a synergy of mercy, reunion, compassion, forgiveness, and love. Grace is a core attribute of God that Jesus embodied. Grace heals us, assures our belonging as a cherished member of God's family, refreshes our hearts and fills us with blessings, spiritual gifts, and abundant life. Grace is an unmerited gift of God.

Paul was a zealous persecutor of Christians. Then on the road, to Damascus he encountered the grace of God and was transformed, even his name changed from Saul to Paul, from a persecutor to a fervent missionary. Grace transformed all the disciples from fearful, bickering, lost wanderers to passion-filled disciples spreading the good news of God's grace everywhere they went.

God's grace transforms us enabling us to be filled with God's peace. The resurrected Jesus greeted believers over and over again with peace be with you. Peace is a synergy of trust, hope, inner tranquility and confidence that flows from the transforming grace of God. All of this and much more is expressed in the words, grace to you and peace in the name of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. The source, the central pebble is Jesus who is radiating out ever widening ripples of grace and peace.

The Apostle Paul burst forth with prayers of thanksgiving for the transformational power of grace and peace in his life and in the believers around him. Paul modeled how we are to pray for one another. Thanking God for each other. Praising God for the love and faith we see in each other and praising God for the good each of us does. Thanking God for the refreshing ripples of grace and peace radiating out from God through us and touching those around us.

Paul takes his prayer one step further he writes it down and sends it in an encouraging letter. How would you feel to receive a card from someone which said? I thank God for you. I rejoice in you because I hear of your love for all people and the ways you refresh hearts.

The Apostle Paul is teaching us how to pray. Thanking God for the ways others are sharing love and refreshing hearts. Rejoicing in the ripple effect for every act of love expands for eternity. Prayer is a primary way God refreshes the one praying. When we thank God for others sharing love, we are inspired to share love

as well. This is a time when many of us are formulating fresh routines for the next nine months. How will you daily share love? What will you do to refresh your heart and the hearts of others.

I constantly need the refreshing ripples of grace and peace in my life because of the way my mind can get stuck. When something is not well-organized, planned, and perfect I am disappointed in myself. When someone hurts me or says a negative word, I tend to dwell on the negative instead of all the wonderful things that person does. Sometimes I spend too much time listening to negative stories rather than all the amazing stories of joy, love, and grandeur. If I do not spend some time with God and perform acts of love to refresh my heart, then I start replaying these negative perceptions taking me on a downward spiral. I become sad and grumpy rather than having a refreshed heart that is receiving and giving love. My heart goes into protection mode hindering my ability to be at peace, rejoice, and receive and share love. Why do I do that? We all encounter negativity. God has promised that negativity will be transformed into goodness. All the positive that is happening is eternal. The Apostle Paul modeled how to break this downward spiral. Fill your day with prayers of thanksgiving for the good and love in the people around you, encouraging them then your heart will be refreshed. Take risks, embrace change, be bold in loving and your heart will be refreshed.

A refreshed heart welcomes grace, forgiveness, healing and sees each moment as a fresh start, an opportunity to transform the world with love, a smooth lake yearning for the ripples of love. A refreshed heart shares grace overcoming every rift, tearing down every wall, bridging every gap, breaking through every barrier until there is no partiality, until all are loved perfectly.

Biblical Scholar Cain Felder writes, "Those who have been born anew must show others what that new birth means and can affect in everyday, practical terms. The highest and noblest service we believers can render is to reach beyond established barriers of human separation, social class, and ethnicity and touch the lives of persons who are considered different and unprofitable. However wasted anyone's life may seem to be, that person must never be written off. God's grace will intercept us, intervene in our particular situations, inspire hope in our hearts and bring about needed change in our lives. There is a purpose for the life of each and all and there is a service to be rendered by each of us in this world."

Thomas Merton writes of the converse influence of the devil saying, "Another characteristic of the devil's moral theology is the exaggeration of all distinctions between this and that, good and evil, right and wrong. These distinctions become complex divisions. No longer is there any sense that we might perhaps all be more or less at fault, and that we all might be expected to take upon our own shoulders the wrongs of others by forgiveness, acceptance, patient understanding and love, and thus help one another to find the truth. On the contrary, in the devil's theology, the important thing is to be absolutely right and to prove that everybody else is absolutely wrong. This does not exactly make for peace and unity...because it means that everyone wants to be absolutely right...And in order to prove their rightness they have to punish and eliminate those who are wrong."

Pastor Eugene Peterson wrote, "The immense world of God's grace first purges us and then forges our vocations in a blaze of holiness." God's grace transformed Saul into Paul which set ablaze his vocation. A vocation of prayer, praising God for God's grace which transforms us; Prayer thanking God for the good, love, and faith of others and then sharing those prayers in encouraging words. Paul's vocation was to pay forward the grace and peace of God in ever expanding ripples.

One of my favorite movies is *Pay it Forward*. The movie expresses this ripple effect. A teacher inspires a student, Trevor, with the assignment, "Think of an idea to change our world and put it into action." Trevor puts into action "Pay it Forward". It starts with Trevor. He picks three people to help. It has to be something really big. Something they can't do by themselves, so Trevor does it for them and they do it for three other people that's 9 and 9 do three more that's 27 and it gets big really fast. "Pay it Forward," some believe in it, others think it is too utopian, others think because it is based on the honor system it will fizzle. The teacher says it is possible, but it requires an extreme act of faith in the goodness of people. Trevor pays it forward for three people. He does not allow pay backs he insists they pay it forward. Trevor says, "It's hard you can't plan it. You have to watch people more, keep an eye on them to protect them cause they can't always see what they need. It's our big chance to fix the world. You can fix a person. Trevor discovers that "Pay it Forward" is tough because people are afraid, unable to see the beautiful person they can become and the good they can pay forward. He says, "I think some people are too scared or something. I think things can be different. I guess it is hard for some people who are so use to things as they are, especially when there bad, to change because they give up and when they do everyone loses. When you open your heart, it works and when you close your heart it

dies.” His initial excitement turns to disappointment as it seems the people he helped were unable to change and pay it forward yet over time the spark of love gets passed on. In the end, a multitude of people are touched and “Pay it Forward” becomes a movement helping a multitude of people shine.

William Shakespeare wrote, “How far the little candle throws its beams! So shines a good deed in a naughty world.” Daily prayers of thanksgiving for the good, love and faith of everyone you know. Speak and write words of encouragement naming the love and beauty you see in them. Yes, this even includes your least favorite person. Work to reconcile every one of your relationships and help others reconcile their relationships. Seize the opportunities in your life to do big favors for others, something they can’t do themselves and don’t let them pay it back instead ask them to pay it forward.

Rarely does anyone change because someone tells them to change. However, if you change yourself, change to a more gracious, loving, joyful way of interacting with someone, they, in time will change and the world will change.

Paying forward love refreshes your heart and changes the world. Trevor said, “When you open your heart it works and when you close your heart it dies.” This is such a profound truth that we label it the Doctrine of Incurvatus. Jesus taught and modeled it. The Apostles wrote about it. Many theologians including Augustine, John Calvin, and Karl Barth wrote lengthy explanations. In short when one encounters tough times, one tends to turn their heart in on themselves. We do it because it seems like the way to protect our self, however it hurts us even more. Our heart is refreshed when it turns out, loving others, receiving love, praise others, rejoicing in goodness.

Paul ends his letters with an outward refreshed heart writing some version of “The grace and peace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with you”. God’s great ripple effect inspiring you to pay grace and peace forward. The grace and peace of Christ be with you. //// Please rise in body or spirit and share the grace and peace of Christ with those around you.