

*"I don't know anyone more qualified to teach us about grace."*

RUTH GRAHAM

# COURAGEOUS GRACE

FOLLOWING THE WAY OF CHRIST

GAYLE HAGGARD

Gayle Haggard gives life-learned insight into the concept of grace. Her wisdom comes from the depths of her experience in ministry as pastor's wife in a megachurch, mother of a special-needs child, and wife of a publicly fallen pastor. She doesn't just teach it; she lives it day in and day out in the face of painful reality. I don't know of anyone more qualified to teach us about this life-giving characteristic of God's nature. If you know someone in need of grace, if you need to give grace to someone, if you need grace for yourself, buy this book today.

**RUTH GRAHAM**, author of *In Every Pew Sits a Broken Heart* and *Fear Not Tomorrow, God Is Already There*

My soul cheered as I turned the pages of Gayle Haggard's book *Courageous Grace*. Gayle has written a beautiful and heroic manifesto of how Jesus wants us to live. If we open up our hearts and pay close attention to the words inside, our lives will be forever changed.

**MIKE FOSTER**, author of *Gracenomics: Unleash the Power of Second Chance Living*

If I'm stuck in the Antarctic with no hope, give me Ernest Shackleton. If my plane is about to crash, give me Captain Sully. But if my life unravels and I need hope and God's grace, I would first turn to Gayle Haggard. In her latest work, *Courageous Grace*, Gayle lays out a road map to bring us closer to the heart of our Father. After reading this, I couldn't help but feel that grace is tougher than I thought. It is less like a flower and more like an anvil on which lives

can be reheated and reformed into God's purposes again. One word of caution: *Courageous Grace* could be detrimental to your preconceived ideas of the gospel.

**MICHAEL CHESHIRE**, senior pastor, The Journey Community Church

Through her own personal trail of tears, Gayle Haggard has compassionately and biblically captured the very core of the great gift of grace. Her honest explanations of our human struggling to the liberating need for forgiveness and restorative healing are absolutely captivating! *Courageous Grace* is a medicine that heals our damaged souls and restores us again and again to the rank of beloved, accepted, and cherished.

**FRED ANTONELLI**, founding director of Life Counseling Center.

# COURAGEOUS **GRACE**



COURAGEOUS  

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# Dear Reader

WHY ANOTHER BOOK ON GRACE? There is no shortage of books about God's amazing grace and how blessed we are to be its recipients. Yet there is another dimension of grace about which many of these books fail to inform. That is the courage that is often required for us, in turn, to bestow grace on one another.

As followers of Christ, we will be called on to demonstrate the grace that God has so courageously and freely given to us. This grace will compel us to step out of safe confines and sometimes suffer pain for the good of another human being. At times, extending that grace will be costly to our personal lives, our reputations, and our futures. We may even find ourselves numbered with transgressors. But it's in these situations that we can best represent Jesus.

Thus, my reason for writing another book about grace is to inspire all who have received the liberating grace of God in their own lives to courageously and lovingly bestow that same grace on others. For it is by this that the world will know we are his disciples.

Grace and courage to you.

With love,

*Gayle Haggard*

OCTOBER 26, 2012

*If we want to be Christians, we must have some share in Christ's large-heartedness by acting with responsibility and in freedom when the hour of danger comes, and by showing a real sympathy that springs, not from fear, but from the liberating and redeeming love of Christ for all who suffer. Mere waiting and looking on is not Christian behaviour. The Christian is called to sympathy and action, not in the first place by his own sufferings, but by the sufferings of his brethren, for whose sake Christ suffered.*

—DIETRICH BONHOEFFER

# I

## My Epiphany

*Let the one who has never sinned throw the first stone!*

—JOHN 8:7

ONE OF THE GREATEST TESTS of our character is how we respond when someone else errs. When other people fall short of doing what we and they know to be good and right, when they suffer loss or shame, or when they hurt us, how we respond speaks volumes about the condition of our own hearts. We may find that we possess tremendous ability to encourage others, to heal and restore, if only we choose to do so. Untold lives have been changed, reprobates have become saints, and cowards have become heroes—all because of the response of some kindhearted soul in another's moment of trial.

An ex-convict becomes a benevolent mayor who employs

the poor, rescues a dying prostitute, and provides for her orphaned daughter—all because an elderly bishop refused to press charges against him for stealing his silver and instead covered the thief’s sin with kindness and protected him from his accusers. This elderly bishop turned the ex-convict’s life around by encouraging him to become a new man and offered these kind words: “My brother, you no longer belong to evil, but to good.”<sup>1</sup> By now you may recognize this as the story of Jean Valjean in Victor Hugo’s classic *Les Misérables*.

A failing student makes the honor roll because a caring teacher sacrifices her time to tutor him after school.

A parolee becomes a star employee because a kind employer takes the risk of giving him a job.

An addict is given a warm meal, a safe bed, and hope for a better future by an empathetic halfway-house worker.

We’ve all heard these heartwarming stories. They inspire us to extend grace to others.

I used to think extending grace was easy. I used to think it was simply the hope-filled, life-giving message of our faith. I understood the word *grace* to refer to God’s kindness and forgiveness, which not only redeem us but also empower us to get back up again when we’ve fallen. In my mind, human grace was all about offering to others what God has so freely given to us.

Isn’t that what the Bible teaches?

But in 2006, as I sat alone on a Florida beach one overcast day, I had an epiphany about grace. My family was going through a dark time. My well-known and highly respected

husband had suffered a moral failure, and we'd been whisked away to a secluded beach house to escape the clamor of the media at home. During the initial days following the devastating news, I went on long walks on the beach until I was sure I was out of view of any beachcombers. Then, alone, I would plant myself in the sand, feel the magnitude of my pain, and sink deep into my own thoughts. A storm of accusations was raining down on me. I felt weakened by their onslaught. But those near and dear to me needed me more than ever. On this particular day, my predicament became clear.

*Examine yourselves to see  
if your faith is genuine.*

*Test yourselves.*

2 Corinthians 13:5

## Grace Isn't Easy

Grace isn't easy after all. It challenges the core of our character and uncovers what we truly believe about God, about ourselves, and about others.

Forgiveness is tough. Sometimes it requires sacrifice on our part.

And offering mercy isn't the easy way out as some people, who associate it with weakness, suggest. On the contrary, it often demands unusual courage.

I knew my epiphany that day was a call to courage to stand with what I believe about God, about the teachings of the Bible, and about marriage, family, and friendships. I determined on that day that healing and restoration are

worth the challenge, the sacrifice, the fortitude, and even the pain.

If you're experiencing anything similar to what I was as I sat on that desolate beach under a sunless sky, you know full well the pain I'm talking about. Maybe someone has wronged you and betrayed your trust. As a result, you have been struggling with a mixture of anger, bitterness, and confusion deep inside you for months—maybe for years. Extending grace to someone who has wronged you can be hard work.

Or maybe you're the one in need of grace. (The truth is, we all need it.) Perhaps you have strayed somewhere along the path of life. Others—maybe even those who once called themselves friends—are accusing you. Or perhaps you're hiding secret shame. You may think that if others really knew the truth about you, they would reject you. Your own soul sits in judgment over you. Learning to forgive yourself is sometimes the hardest work of all.

Here is what I heard clearly that day and what I want you to hear: offering grace and mercy may take every ounce of strength and courage you have, but reconciliation is worth it all. It is worth the pain.

As I contemplated these ideas that day on the beach, I felt as if a beacon of light had broken through the gloom surrounding me and illumined my clouded mind. I began to understand our personal plight as a picture of the human experience. We all come to a point in our lives when we recognize our own fallibility—even after we've professed our Christian faith. None of us is immune. Some of us suffer with

debilitating physical sickness and disease, some with brain dysfunction, others with destructive behaviors or addictions. It's our human condition that makes the gospel so meaningful for all of us. God sent Jesus to rescue us from the power of sin and death in our lives, and this is an ongoing process.

Suddenly, I no longer felt weak or hopeless. I felt my heart lift and my spirit fill with resolve. I could see clearly what had to be done to bring healing and restoration. In that hour, my epiphany became a call to courageously demonstrate the grace and love that the Bible identifies as the foremost expressions of our faith.

### **What Did Jesus Do?**

Have you ever felt caught in the middle? At some point in your life, you will find yourself there, if you haven't already. On one side you have a broken person, someone who has erred. On the other, a crowd of accusers. When that day comes, you'll have to decide whether to do nothing, to side with the accusers, or to stand with the accused. Which choice do you think demands the most courage?

John the beloved disciple tells the story of a woman who was caught in the act of adultery. When the teachers of religious law and the Pharisees brought her to Jesus, they asked him if she should be stoned for her sin according to the laws of Moses. Their intent was not only to condemn the woman but also to trap Jesus so they could validate their judgments against him for not complying with their Jewish customs

and laws. I can only imagine the fear and embarrassment the woman felt as perhaps hundreds of accusing eyes stared down at her. No doubt some in the crowd were aligning themselves with the religious leaders and were readying themselves to pick up stones and shout insults.

On one side was the woman, stained by sin, shielding herself from an impending onslaught of rocks and stones. On the other stood her accusers—the religious leaders and the crowd trained to follow their cues.

In the middle . . . was Jesus.

Everyone was waiting to see what he would do.

Jesus knew the woman's sins. He also knew the expectations of everyone present. He responded by simply stooping down and writing in the dust with his finger. We don't know

*If you falter in a time  
of trouble, how small  
is your strength!*

Proverbs 24:10 (NIV)

what he wrote. Some speculate that he began listing the sins of those present. What I appreciate most, however, is the way Jesus remained unruffled in the face of the accusations and intended entrapment.

His goal was to point out to the accusers that not one of them was in a position to judge this woman. His response to them was, "All right, but let the one who has never sinned throw the first stone!" (John 8:7).

The Bible goes on to say,

When the accusers heard this, they slipped away one by one, beginning with the oldest, until only Jesus

was left in the middle of the crowd with the woman. Then Jesus stood up again and said to the woman, “Where are your accusers? Didn’t even one of them condemn you?”

“No, Lord,” she said.

And Jesus said, “Neither do I. Go and sin no more.”

JOHN 8:9-11

Jesus refused to yield to the religious leaders’ demand that he condemn her. Instead he offered her grace.

I’ve read this story many times. But I had never before lived it the way I did when I sat on the sandy beach that day. I realized that those dark days were my moment “in the middle.” I had a choice. Was I going to stand with the broken one—in this case, my husband—or was I going to join his accusers and the people who were so ready to throw stones?

For me, the choice itself wasn’t all that difficult. I had a long history with Ted. We’d built a family and a great church together. I knew he loved me and was himself heartbroken and ashamed. I knew he was earnestly seeking restoration and reconciliation. And I was determined not to let his sin negate everything good I also knew to be true of him. I also knew it was my opportunity to put into practice all that I had said I believe as a Christian.

The challenge I faced was that in choosing to stand *with* my husband, I was going to have to stand *against* the tide of condemnation that was swelling against him. I knew I

would need courage to stand beside him as the arrows, the stones, and the accusations rained down upon him. I had to be prepared to withstand the brunt of those attacks. And I'll be honest. They hurt deeply.

Yet it took this public scandal in my family for me to grasp the truth that God extends his grace freely toward people we humans are prone to condemn. He doesn't with-

*In God's presence we  
discover ourselves able to  
love one another, to be  
vessels of heroic love.*

Frederica Mathewes-Green

hold it as we humans can be tempted to do. We may be afraid of extending grace because doing so will dissociate us from the crowd. We may be afraid the recipient of our grace will take advantage of us. We may be afraid that the one receiving it will not prove trustworthy and will fail us, hurt us, or embarrass us again. But God does not withhold his grace in this manner. Instead, he pours out his grace time and again, knowing full well that we are human and weak and will continue to stumble and fail. Yet he extends his grace all the same.

I experienced this grace. When I felt alone because many people I knew had pulled away, God drew near. He came looking for me when I was most dejected. When others avoided me, God threw his arms around me and welcomed me home. I can't tell you how much I learned from my family's public humiliation. Through the swirl of pain and confusion, personal failures and weaknesses, all the way to the core of my being, I felt safe with God.

There will be times when you experience the differing

elements in the story of the woman caught in adultery, just as I did. You may be the one who is “caught in the act,” the one who has erred and is suffering under the weight of guilt and shame. Consider how you would want others to respond to you. You may be called on to join the crowd of accusers and stone throwers who cloak their own deceitfulness and sins. Or you may find yourself caught in the middle between brokenness on one side and accusations on the other. Consider how you would want to respond when you are called upon to make choices about someone who has erred: like Jesus, who chose not to condemn but to offer grace, or like the accusing crowd?