

How Grace Saved Our Marriage

From: Overcoming the Overwhelming:
A 40-Day Journey toward Rediscovering Faith in God
Taken from Day 6: Allowing Grace to Permeate Your Life
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I'd like to share with you how grace completely overhauled our marriage—which was for us for many years completely overwhelming.

When we first met, we liked each other right away, but it would be almost two years before we got married. We first became close friends and then realized this friendship had blossomed into love. We were both so blessed to have found each other.

At first, there was the normal tension of learning to get along, then somehow, law crept into our relationship in the form of religious expectations. It was so subtle that we didn't notice it was taking place. Gradually, a true friendship of two equal partners in life and ministry became lopsided as a result of accumulating false perspectives on submission. No wonder we struggled. This distorted view of marriage surrounded us!

On top of that, anything we might have done to enjoy each other's company involved breaking the religious laws that were "understood" among those who attended our church. We couldn't go out dancing together. We couldn't attend a concert. We couldn't go to the movies and share a bag of popcorn. We didn't even have a television. It seemed no matter which way we turned, all we could do together involved the church.

The two of us were longing for grace but often ended up giving each other quite the opposite. In between fantastic days of love and friendship, we would engage in intense arguments that devastated us both for days. It was very confusing because David and I sincerely and deeply loved each other. We were best friends. We lived together and were learning to enjoy life together. We worked on our house and yard together. We were committed to each other and to staying married. We were dedicated to our children. When we weren't arguing, we enjoyed our life together.

Eventually, the frequent arguments became overwhelming for me. I felt like a complete failure and couldn't comprehend how we could endure another blowout.

Just after celebrating our 25th anniversary, I prayed, "Lord," I whimpered, "I'm not willing to live like this any longer. I love David. I want to live a long life with him, but not like this. Help me, Jesus. Give me wisdom."

Without having the understanding of how to overcome the overwhelming like I do now, I unwittingly took the first step toward victory. I gave up trying and asked God for wisdom. There was something inside of me that just gave up. Nothing we'd done to fix our relationship worked, and I was convinced nothing new would either.

God gives wisdom when we ask Him for it in faith, and He did not let me down in my moment of mourning. As clearly as ever, I heard the Holy Spirit speak to my heart, "Cathy, the only behavior you can change is your own." Looking in, one might think that God was being harsh with me, considering how much pain I was experiencing, but that is not how my broken heart received it. Though He was clearly correcting me, at the same instant, He set me free. Suddenly, I had faith that I could let go of trying to coerce change out of David and let God do His work in me.

After a few years, our argument cycles mostly ceased. Both of us began to experience a new enjoyment in marriage, and not only did I change, but so did he—all without my meddling. Imagine that! Did he become the perfect spouse? Did I? No and no. However, grace began to operate in beautiful ways. No, he wasn't perfect, but neither was I. Joy came when we learned to accept each other—flaws and all. Believe me, only the grace of God could work this in our hearts. We stopped trying to fix each other. What a relief!

You see, even though we thoroughly understand that God loves us unconditionally and that our sins and lawless deeds He remembers no more, it really is another thing entirely to love others unconditionally and to remember their sins no more. We fall into this way of thinking: **"Grace for me but no grace for you!"** Not until we learn to extend to others the grace that God is extending to us can we really deeply know what grace means—for those who are closest and dearest to our hearts and even for the nameless crazy drivers who cut us off on the freeway.

"Love one another as I have loved you." Jesus did not mean to feel love for each other. He meant to *demonstrate* love for each

other. If there is a relationship in your life that might right now be devastating you, the answer is to be found in accepting His grace toward you and allowing that same grace to flow through you.

“Grace for me and grace for you.”

Ephesians 4:29-32

*Let no corrupt word proceed out of your mouth, but what is good for necessary edification, **that it may impart grace to the hearers.** ³⁰And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption. ³¹Let all bitterness, wrath, anger, clamor, and evil speaking be put away from you, with all malice. ³²**And be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God in Christ forgave you.***

