

**Russell Kelfer**

# **Agape Grace: A Heart to Serve**

**#1352-A**

**Series: God's Amazing Grace**

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10602 Mossbank, San Antonio, TX 78230 • (210) 226-0000 / 1-800-375-7778 • [www.dtm.org](http://www.dtm.org) • [dtm@dtm.org](mailto:dtm@dtm.org)



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*Gracious Lord, coming King, Savior, we love You. As we come into Your presence together, we simply, quietly, lay aside the cares of this world that have captivated us and look to You. We come sometimes on Sunday mornings so hurried, sometimes actually frustrated by the time constraints and all the things that bind us. Now that we are here, Father, we pray we might each take a deep breath and focus our eyes on Jesus.*

*We pray, our Father, that You would be our teacher. We lift up those for whom we have been so burdened. We ask You, Father, as well, that You would touch the hearts of those whose names we know not, but whose hearts You know, even in our fellowship, who are struggling through loneliness and despair; those who are struggling through difficult illnesses and those struggling through spiritual warfare. Grant us an outpouring of Your grace, and be our teacher, we pray.*

*Open our hearts, Father. Do open-heart surgery if you will, as it is needed. We pray that Your Spirit might be at work in each of our lives, and that we might be surrendering, even now, those areas of our lives we have left locked up and not set free. So, Father, we give this time to You, our lives to You, and this day to You.*

*In Jesus' name. Amen.*

It's not the way you and I would have written the story. In fact, we would have written it 180 degrees from the way it was written in Scripture. The roles would have been reversed. We could picture, I think, Jesus sitting on a throne and His disciples gathered around at His feet worshipping Him; perhaps at some point being humbled enough to wash His feet in an act of worship. We can picture that.

But that is not how it happened. You know the story.

And supper being ended, the devil having already put it into the heart of Judas Iscariot, Simon's son, to betray Him,

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Jesus, knowing that the Father had given all things into His hands, and that He had come from God and was going to God,

Rose from supper and laid aside His garments, took a towel and girded Himself.

After that, He poured water into a basin and began to wash the disciples' feet, and to wipe them with the towel with which He was girded.

Then He came to Simon Peter. And Peter said to Him, "Lord, are You washing my feet?"

Jesus answered and said to him, "What I am doing you do not understand now, but you will know after this."

Peter said to Him, "You shall never wash my feet!" [Don't ever say that to God...Thou shalt never.] Jesus answered him, "If I do not wash you, you have no part with Me."

Simon Peter said to Him, [Then give me a bath; he still didn't quite get it.] "Lord, not my feet only, but also my hands and my head!"

Jesus said to him, "He who is bathed needs only to wash his feet, but is completely clean; and you are clean, but not all of you."

For He knew who would betray Him; therefore He said, "You are not all clean."

So when He had washed their feet, taken His garments, and sat down again, He said to them, "Do you know what I have done to you? [What a neat question.]

You call Me Teacher and Lord, and you say well, for so I am.

If I then, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet.

For I have given you an example, that you should do as I have done to you.

Most assuredly, I say to you, a servant is not greater than his master; nor is he who is sent greater than he who sent him.

If you know these things, blessed are you if you do them.

(John 13:3-17 NKJV)

If you would like to, underline two words in verse 17; the words know and do. Do you get the picture? The Creator God of heaven and earth was on His knees bowed before these confused disciples, water basin at one side, washing the dirty,

grimy feet of these common men. It doesn't sound right, does it? The roles are reversed. The picture looks backwards. It doesn't seem right. We would paint it the other way. But God had a message to proclaim, a story to tell, and He wasn't about to let this opportunity pass.

He wanted to send a message to the church, a church that would quickly become class-oriented and self-absorbed. The message He wanted to send was so revolutionary, it really went right past them. Sometimes you grasp a truth, or something happens that is so extraordinary, so powerful, that you can't grasp it at the time. But Jesus chose this time, and the intensity of every phrase was designed to implement a spiritual truth that would be one of the deepest truths he would ever teach the church.

He wanted it indelibly engraved on their hearts and on our hearts. If you view the church or you view our lives in the light of it, however, don't you kind of wonder if we have ever really caught how immense and how intense this lesson was supposed to be?

The time was the Passover celebration. It was a sacrifice different from all others. It was not of the Law, for it was instituted before the Law. It was unclear how much of the ceremonial ritual was still obligatory at the time of Christ. But it is likely that they were dressed in festive attire according to Alfred Edersheim, in his book, Jesus, the Messiah. It's also probable that they would, as Jewish law prescribed, be reclined on pillows around a very low table, each one resting on his left hand.

We also know that the atmosphere surrounding this particular Passover was unusual because it was filled with contention. The disciples were arguing over who was the greatest or most important. It was customary, even among the Pharisees, that when you gathered for the Passover, you would sit at a table according to rank. So, the disciples were arguing, trying to decide which one deserved the seat of greatest honor. How sad, but how fortunate, because it set the stage for one of Jesus' most important teachings in the New Testament.

Now there was also a dispute among them, as to which of them should be considered the greatest.

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And He said to them, “The kings of the Gentiles exercise lordship over them, and those who exercise authority over them are called ‘benefactors.’

But not so among you; on the contrary, he who is greatest among you, let him be as the younger, and he who governs as he who serves.

For who is greater, he who sits at the table, or he who serves? Is it not he who sits at the table? Yet I am among you as the One who serves. (Luke 22:24-27 NKJV)

He was setting the stage. It was going to be an audio-visual presentation. He was contrasting the world’s concepts of greatness with God’s, and they aren’t remotely the same; they are 180 degrees opposite. The world has its leaders sit above the masses and exercise authority and be served, but not so in the Kingdom. Those who would be greatest must put on the cloak of a slave and do the most menial of things for the most undeserving people, or they could not follow in the footsteps of Jesus, for He was among them as one who served.

The Passover supper would normally begin with a pair of benedictions, and then the one who was leading the celebration—in this case, Jesus—would commence with the first of two handwashing rituals that would take place. Apparently, it was at this point, before dinner was actually served, that Jesus rose from His place and shocked the disciples. They weren’t shocked that He would lead them in the handwashing; they expected that. But when He took off His outer garment, wrapped Himself about with a towel, and began to pour water into a basin, He was assuming the role of a common slave. In fact, the word used for towel here, was one used both in ceremonial washing and bathing, and was usually associated with the work of a slave or a servant, a common man.

Peter, most likely, would have been at the end of the table, and it was with him that Jesus began. These men had all walked a good distance, probably in sandals or barefoot, or perhaps in some kind of shoes. The grime and dirt and dust would have been most unpleasant. It’s the kind of thing aristocracy would never do. That was just the point Jesus was trying to make. Peter, of course, objected. Jesus, of course, responded. Peter gave in, but still didn’t have a clue what was going on. Later on, he did. But Jesus was trying to take a picture of these squabbling,

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contentious disciples, who, in the very presence of God, Himself, were arguing over who could get the most personal glory. It was a perfect backdrop for Him to describe what the Kingdom wasn't. The Kingdom isn't a place for believers to magnify their own spirituality. In fact, Jesus explained it this way:

Yet it shall not be so among you; but whoever desires to become great among you, let him be your servant.

And whoever desires to be first among you, let him be your slave —

Just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many.

(Matthew 20:26-28 NKJV)

That's the gospel. That's our calling. So, Jesus girded Himself with a towel and did the thing these men were the least likely to expect Him to do. He looked them straight in the eye, and after He had washed their dirty feet, He continued this interactive message. He reminded them that a servant is not greater than his master. And if He, Jesus, their Master and Lord, was sent to do the most menial kinds of things to the most undeserving of people, *what do you think He sent us to do?*

Then He gave a postscript to His message. This postscript ought to be added to every message He ever gave. He said this in a loose translation, "It is wonderful for you to come to church or Sunday school and hear these messages. It is even better if you leave somewhat convicted, understanding what they mean. But, beloved, it will only make a difference if you leave here and do what you have been taught." That's what He said.

The joy will come in obedience, not in adding to your storehouse of knowledge. Wisdom is not the doing of understanding. You choose; God enables. But unless you consciously choose, you do not let the grace flow and you become more accountable and less spiritual, because to whom much is given much will be required (Luke 12:48). The key isn't learning more. You do continue the process of learning, but the key is acting on what you know. That's what Jesus was saying.

That may be the curse of this information-oriented age in which we live. We can learn more and learn it more quickly than any generation. I know those of you here who have the

right brand of computers can understand this. You can put a CD Rom in and press a dialog box, type in a subject, and presto, you have information at your disposal that would have taken days to find a few years ago. You can click on another box and a picture will flash up so you can even see a background of what you are studying. You have video machines and you can play enactments of Bible stories. You have tape recorders so you can listen to any message about any subject at any time. There are bookstores all over that sell nothing but Christian books. We are glutted with information.

But, beloved, this age of spiritually over-fed, under-exercised saints, with all of our mass of materials, may be one of the least spiritually sensitive in generations. We have become so self-serving, so preoccupied with our own comfort and convenience that we think obedience is an option that we can lay aside for some future time when it fits into our schedule. We think our affluence has made us immune to dealing with the common man. We think our spiritual knowledge has elevated us to a position above having to do the menial things or minister to the undesirables of our age. We have enlarged that list of undesirables to include most of society, until we have built little clusters of self-satisfied saints, who think ministering means being happy together. We insulate ourselves so that no one will upset the status quo, spiritually.

Meanwhile, there is a world of dying, despondent people right in our backyards and all the way to the uttermost parts of the earth, who are crying out to be loved and served, but we are too busy learning more to hear their cries. We must continue to learn, but learning includes responding to what we hear. Jesus knew these self-appointed, would-be diplomats in the coming Kingdom didn't grasp it, so He concluded, "Don't just stand there, go out and do something. Serve!"

It is to that one commandment that we dedicate this lesson. You can probably see that this is one of those, *I wish I had stayed home and slept* kind of Sundays. But let me remind you of three basic things before we go further and then we will look at some principles from these passages.

1- God expects us to go to the most unlikely people in the world to minister: the sick, the dying, the lame, the prisoner, the



hungry, the naked, the lonely, the grieving. Jesus told us when we minister to them, we minister to Him. While our meetings take place in homes or churches and there we feed on His Word, absorb His instructions, and enjoy our fellowship, much of the ministry should take place in the nursing homes, the funeral homes, the hospitals, and the prisons. There we will find people who need help, and know they need help. There, we will find people, who stripped of their self-sufficiency and often their self-worth, will be humble enough to seek the Great Physician.

2- God expects us, when we get there, to do for them the most menial things, if need be, to demonstrate the love of God. We weren't sent to pass out tracts, pat them on the head, and leave the impression that if they pay attention, they can become great Christians like us. That's not what it's all about. We were sent to demonstrate physically how our Great God and Savior, Jesus Christ, laid aside His robes of righteousness and took on the form of a slave to save them from their sins. And like Jesus, we have to use interactive tools, and guess who the tools are? We are! We are the interactive part. We humble ourselves. We love. We serve. At any point where we condescend, we have lost. The message is no longer clear. If you go as a servant, and once you're there, you lord it over those you came to serve, forget it.

3- It is also clear that it's not the natural thing to do. Apart from some supernatural act of the grace of God, most of us will not maintain the role of a slave. The flesh hates it. In fact, left to ourselves, we will send others, but we won't go. Left to ourselves, if we go, we will do so grudgingly, or at best, uncomfortably until those we go to become uncomfortable as well. Finally, left to ourselves we will try if we do go, to do it in our own energy by gritting our teeth, and we will short-circuit the grace of God.

Beloved, the calling of the church is to get outside its hallowed halls and lay aside its sanctimonious superiority and go where hurting, dying people are. When we get there, we are to serve them. You may not need to wash their feet, I don't know. But what we may be asked to do may be much more distasteful than that. It didn't bother Jesus. It ought not to bother us.

We have come to believe that being a Christian involves coming to church when it's not too inconvenient, learning everything we can that's not too convicting, and then going

back into the world, hanging on by our spiritual teeth until the next chance we have to come together, learn more and have more fellowship.

Sometimes we satisfy our guilt by giving, either to pay the bills or even to send missionaries to the four corners of the earth. But the average Christian still does not seem to grasp—even the more spiritual, sensitive ones—that Jesus in us, wants us to take what we’ve learned, lay aside our robes of spiritual superiority, and go into the ghettos of life, if need be, and love the unlovable.

I would like us to take this issue and spend the next few minutes looking at three basic thoughts: the priorities, the problems, and the principles. Then you draw your own conclusions about what God may or may not be saying to you. But I ask you, whatever He says to you, don’t just think about it; be willing to do it. Otherwise, you can add this lesson to a long list of “things we learned about the will of God and decided to do nothing about.”

### THE PRIORITIES

Let’s simplify and review. We basically need simplicity. That’s why God gave us such a simple gospel. That’s why Jesus broke down His commandments into such simple instructions. We are the ones who, in an effort to justify our theological positions or our spirituality, tend to make the simple complicated. There are simple priorities that have evolved thus far, and I would like us to look at them.

Priority 1- When we minister to the hungry, the thirsty, the naked, the sick, the prisoner and the stranger, Scripture says we minister to Jesus Himself. (Matthew 25:31-48). I don’t know if there is really time to do this, but we talked last week about the issue of ministering to prisoners. I got a letter yesterday from a prisoner who was in the Bexar County jail, and was responding to some materials, and has since been moved. I won’t mention any names because he is from this area. But I just wanted to give you an idea of how God works in peoples’ lives once they are put in a position where all of their self-worth seems to be separated from them and they have nothing but time.

I won’t read the whole letter, but he was talking about

requesting materials. He said, “This is my first time in prison, Mr. Kelfer, but I know that God is with me. On the night that I lay in my cell in the jail and my name was called informing me I was going to prison, my heart raced and I was very nervous, so much so, that my hands shook. Just as I entered the elevator on that floor, I called upon the name of the Lord. Mr. Kelfer, in all my Christian walk I will never forget the voice that answered me. It was very real. It filled my thoughts, and for a second nothing else mattered. I was filled with peace and I stopped shaking. It was as if Jesus said to me, ‘I am with you.’ Isn’t He wonderful? Jesus is alive. Praise His holy name. King of kings. Please continue to pray for my children. (He has one 5, one 4, one 3, and one 2.) Pray for their mother and for their mother’s mother. Pray that God will recondition their hearts and open a way of communication between the children and myself. I stand on Genesis 18:14, *Who is like unto God; there is no other.* God is already using me to reach others here in prison. He is truly amazing and forgiving. All the glory, power and praise be to the Lamb of God, Jesus Christ. I give to Him all the glory.” Then he begins to talk about some of the ways God has allowed him to minister to others in prison.

But you can take him, and multiply him by thousands upon thousands. That’s part of the ministry of the church. I don’t mean we ignore the banker, the corporate executive, or the teacher. It does not mean that we do not become evangelists in our neighborhood, at our office, or in our schools. We know better. Of course, we do. But we also know there are some people so dear to God’s heart according to Scripture, that He promised to defend them and protect them in ways beyond how He would protect everyone else. The Scripture defines them as the “poor,” the “disadvantaged,” the “afflicted.” To ignore them individually or corporately, is to ignore the commandments of God.

The church needs to get out of its comfort zone and go where Jesus went. He spent most of His ministry time with the sick, the afflicted, the dying, the grieving, and the stranger. Take the gospels and follow Him. Have you ever done that? Just follow Him day after day. “Not many noble, not many mighty, not many wise have been called” (I Corinthians 1:26). It doesn’t say not any. It says not many. Praise God, some laid aside their credentials and took God at His word. They still do.

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But the bulk of His ministry was to the down and out, the crying, the hurting, the lepers, the mentally disturbed, the physically handicapped, the grieving widows. It was on them that His eyes of compassion focused. It was around them that His arms wrapped in love. He knew they were without strength, without hope. He had something called grace. There are two aspects to what Jesus did in meeting needs. I would remind you of those because they apply to the church today.

*1- He met the physical needs of unbelievers in order to draw their attention to spiritual things.* He still does. He healed lepers and blind men and then told them about Living Water. The reason we exist is to seek and save that which is lost. We don't help the hungry to make this world a better place to live; we do so to let them know the love of God and of a world that is a better place to live called heaven. We meet physical needs for the same reason Jesus did; to get their attention, win their respect, and lead them to eternal life. You say, "How do you know that?" Because Jesus said, "What shall it profit a man if he has a full stomach and everything else, and lose his own soul?" (Mark 8:36).

*2- He also told the church to have all things in common.* That is, to meet the physical needs of its own so a lost world looking on could say, I know now who their God is because of how they love and take care of one another. That's what the Agape Ministry in this church is all about—meeting the needs of people within the body. The lost were to know that we are His disciples by that love. The hurting were to be helped by the healthy. The motive would be that the love of Christ constrains us.

So, even today, the church has two callings where meeting physical needs are concerned; the sick, the handicapped, the aged, the stranger, and the prisoner. We're to reach out to unbelievers when possible, meeting physical needs, so they will hear what we say, spiritually; and we are to share within the body so that unbelievers and believers alike will see Jesus by our love. So, Priority 1, we minister to those Jesus ministered to.

Priority 2- This is equally important. The way we do it is in an attitude of utter humility (John 13:3-17). That's what Jesus was saying when He took on the cloak of a servant and washed

the filthy feet of these undeserving disciples. You don't just mail them a check. You get involved. You weep with those who weep. You do whatever is needed to make them more comfortable. Like the Good Samaritan, you don't just give to a fund and hope that whoever is in charge of the fund manages it well. You volunteer to take them where they need to go, to listen to what they have to say, to let them awaken you in the middle of the night, if need be; to give up your own recreation and your own comfort, if need be, to put them first.

If you need to go into a dirty home, go. If you need to wash dirty clothes, do it. If you need to minister to people you don't admire or don't agree with, do it. Jesus did. If you need to sit in a nursing home at the side of a man or a woman who can no longer even remember their name and love them as though they were whole, do it. If you need to sit at the bedside of someone who has no family or friends and show them, they have a friend who sticks closer than a brother, His name is Jesus, do it. Beloved, don't do it as a duty you have to perform. These are not duties. They are opportunities we have been given to minister to the Son of God, the same Son who died in our place. What an honor.

Those are our two priorities based on Matthew 25 and John 13. We are to focus on the hurting, and do so with a servant heart.

### THE PROBLEMS

There are two problems. It isn't happening and it isn't natural.

#### 1- It isn't happening.

I don't say it isn't happening at all. Praise God. Even with my limited vision, I can look out and see people who are doing so, humbly, quietly going to the jails and prisons to set prisoners free in their spirits. Praise God for the men and women who for years have been doing that. For those who have been quietly ministering in the nursing homes, unpleasant though it is, ministering to Jesus, Himself. I'm not going to take that microphone and walk up and down the aisle. You know by now I'm never going to do it. I threaten all the time. But if I were, I think we would find that around 90% of us don't do those things

and don't even pray for those who do. And if the overall impact the church is having in the ghettos, hospitals and prisons of this world is any measuring stick, we have become victims of our own "holy huddle" philosophy. The holy huddle philosophy says as long as we stay together and stay comfortable, we must be ministering. God help us. What are we protecting ourselves from? If we are to be willing to die for the gospel, shouldn't we be willing to get dirty if need be?

2- It isn't natural. Not only is it not happening, it is not natural. Therefore, we can lay it aside as something other than the will of God. The new theology today (but it isn't new) is that if it's God's will, you "feel good about it." Now you think about that. Do you think Jesus got the warm fuzzies by hugging lepers or visiting the crippled at the pool or going to visit Lazarus' family when he was presumed dead? Do you think He enjoyed His encounter with demented souls who were cutting themselves with knives or running around without clothes because they were not in their right minds? I don't think so. I don't think He relished seeing masses of people with no hope. I think He could look at His Father's face and see the joy when He was willing to go where the hurting were and bring them into the Kingdom. It isn't natural. It isn't going to be natural. If it was natural, you wouldn't need the Supernatural One in you to do it. Whatever you and I can do is not eternal and won't last.

### THE PRINCIPLES

That brings us to the application portion of our lesson to the three of you who are still here. How can we make it happen? There are four basic principles.

1- It has to begin at the top. Unless the leaders lead, you will never have an example to follow.

For I have given you an example, [you know what to do now] that ye should do as I have done to you. (John 13:15 NKJV)

So often in today's church we lead by committee, rather than by commitment. We think if we meet enough and talk about something or preach about it often enough, God must be happy. I think in many of the churches around the world today, if we disbanded two-thirds of the committees and formed ministry teams instead to take their place, we would multiply

our impact. Being on committees is more fun because we can get together and share our ignorance. There is a time and place for committees, but I wonder if committees shouldn't determine a course, then disband and become part of the teams who go out into the highways and byways of life and put it into action. Our leaders must never become insulated from the ministry while the sick and the dying and the lost are milling about hopelessly.

2- Once we see the example, we better follow. We don't hire people to do the work of the ministry. If we hire them, it is for them to teach us and show us how to do the work of the ministry. Then you and I—those of us in this room—become the ministry team. We watch and we listen, and then we go and we grow. Jesus said it this way:

Most assuredly, I say to you, a servant is not greater than his master; nor he who is sent greater than he who sent him.

(John 13:16 NKJV)

We don't have privileges Jesus didn't have. His calling was to show us, by example, how to touch and love the down and out. Now, it is our calling even more so, because we have seen it happen. And in like manner, it isn't up to the pastors and the elders to do the work of the ministry for the church; it is up to the pastors and elders to lead. It is up to every one of us in the body to follow. The ministry responsibility is ours.

3- The proof isn't in how excited we get about a commandment; it's in how quickly we obey. Somehow, we have gotten the idea in our generation, that the more emotional we get, or the more convicted we become, the more spiritual we are. The opposite is sometimes true. The more we learn, the more accountable we become. The more convicted we become, the more understanding we have; therefore, the more wisdom we are supposed to demonstrate. Remember, wisdom is acting on your understanding.

You may hear a message about spending time alone with God and you may leave here in tears. Praise God! But those tears are no measure of your wisdom. They may be a measure of your understanding or just an expression of your emotions. Some people cry every time they hear a message. But unless

their tears are dried on the aprons of obedience, they are nothing more than disobedient crybabies. If that message on spending time with God was of God and you were genuinely touched, from that moment on, you should leave and spend more time with God.

The same thing is true of a message on prayer or a message on sharing your faith or searching the Scripture. The proof is measured by your follow-through. If God is speaking to you, and you only get emotional about it but don't change anything, you are now more accountable and a greater hypocrite. Jesus said it in that last verse:

If you know these things, blessed are you if you do them.  
(John 13:17 NKJV)

Beloved, if you never memorize but one more verse in your life, try that one. It came from the lips of Jesus. It couldn't be any simpler. If we were to put it in today's words, Jesus would say, "It is one thing to sit in class and say amen, but that doesn't do a thing for God or a thing for you. Do you want the joy of the Lord? Do you want to thrill the heart of God? Then just leave here and do what God impressed you to do. It's that simple."

4- We can't do it. That is the premise of this whole series. We don't do what God commands us to because it isn't natural. We can make it happen temporarily, but there's no staying power, no continuous motivation and we give up. What's wrong? What's wrong is that only Christ in you can give you both the desire and the ability, by grace, to love the unlovable, to reach out to the unappealing, and to do so to the glory of God. Paul said it this way:

But by the grace of God I am what I am, and His grace toward me was not in vain; but I labored more abundantly than they all, yet not I, but the grace of God which was with me.  
(I Corinthians 15:10 NKJV)

Do you pray regularly for the handicapped? For the sick? For the lonely? For the prisoners? For the hungry? Does your heart break for those on the mission field who don't have clothes to wear or food to eat? We pay missionaries to go tell them God loves them and they see pictures of our country and of our churches and hear stories of our affluence, and when our missionaries go and have to turn a deaf ear to their suffering,



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we wonder why they don't see the love of God? We wonder why they don't hear the love of God?

As you pray, do you ask God to deepen your sense of compassion? Christ lives in you. It was Christ who wept over Jerusalem; who wept at the grave of Lazarus. He can enable you to care for those He cares for. He can give you something called grace. And as you ask Him to do that, make yourself willing to be vulnerable. Are you willing to give up anything God asks you to, so that through your new-found poverty, God can give you spiritual riches?

For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though He was rich, yet for your sakes He became poor, that you through His poverty might become rich.

(II Corinthians 8:9 NKJV)

And as you pray, do you claim God's Word and believe that the impossible is possible where grace is involved?

And God is able to make all grace abound toward you, that you, always having all sufficiency in all things, may have an abundance for every good work.

(II Corinthians 9:8 NKJV)

In other words, you and I can't do it. That's the reason for this study. We need to come to grips with the fact there are key areas in our lives where we are clothed in disobedience; where we do not continually do the will of God as individuals and as a body. And the harder we try the less fruitful we sometimes become, and we get frustrated. The key is that one day you have to come to a deep conviction and cry out to God in anguish, acknowledging your inability while, maybe for the first time, confessing your availability at any cost, where that commandment is concerned. It is at those times that something supernatural is about to happen. God, having seen the desire of your heart and having heard the words from your lips that you are not sufficient, in and of yourself, to do what He asks you to do, delights to make all grace abound toward you. You say, "He can make me love the unlovable?" Beloved, all grace and all sufficiency in all things to every good work. There are no limited warranties with God. It's unlimited grace.

If the church was recognizing its need in this area—the church at large in the world today—and if we, as believers, were

crying out to God for that amazing grace, we would be seeing miracles day after day after day unfolding before our eyes. We would see people coming to Christ from every conceivable background and situation. And the ministry of the church would be totally transformed. We wouldn't have to beg people to go to the jails or the hospitals or the nursing homes. We would have a waiting list. People wouldn't be going out of a sense of duty, but out of a sense of excitement that they could minister to Jesus, Himself.

We would not see only a handful of volunteers willing to go into the ghettos to help teach or feed or take medical aid. We would not have to send the same people over and over to the mission field. The list of people waiting to go would be as long as the church rolls.

We would not be seeing churches looking only for new, fancy places to build new, fancy buildings to minister primarily to the upwardly mobile "now" generation. We would see churches quietly moving out into the "less desirable" parts of the city reaching into neighborhoods where crime is high and hope is low.

We would not see Christians so preoccupied with themselves that they are more interested in improving their own comfort than providing a place for people to live or worship or work who have no place at all.

We would be living in a different world. The hungry would be fed, and in the process, they would find the Bread of Life. The thirsty would find water, and in the process, Living Water would flow into their lives. The naked would not have to beg for clothes, but as they were clothed, they would find their needs met, and they would be clothed in the love of God. The sick would not have to beg for someone to care; they would experience a kind of grace that would impact them, their doctors, their families, and the whole world around them. The stranger and the foreigner would not have to live as an alien, but as a member of a family that knows no ethnic or national bounds. The prisoner would not be isolated from love, for the flow of compassion from the church to the jails would sweep into their hearts and set them free.

All that is lacking, beloved, is agape grace; believers taking

God at His Word, and then crying out for His Spirit to do in and through them, what they cannot do. It will amaze the world. It will encourage the saints. And it will please the heart of God, for as much as we will have done it unto the least of these, we will have done it unto Him. Do you get the picture? Do you grasp it? If so, I have only one question. I won't ask it. I'll let Jesus ask it, if you will, and paraphrase it as we leave.

“If you know these things, why don't you do them?”

Let's pray.

*Our Father and our God, burden our hearts as we leave here today. Speak to each of us individually and to all of us corporately. Help us to know Your will, and knowing it, help us to cry out for the grace to do it. Then make us available for that grace to flow. May we not be satisfied with anything less than Your best.*

*Father, may we return to that sense of New Testament Christian zeal that is not afraid to get dirty; not afraid to get tired; not afraid to be inconvenienced, but is willing to go where the hurting people, the lonely people, and the dying people live to let them know about life eternal.*

*Grant us we pray in the week to come, Father, that You might cause our paths to cross the paths of those who fit this description, then alert our spirits so we know the choice is ours.*

*In Jesus' name, we ask it. Amen.*

### A Challenge to Further Study

1- Read John 13:3-17 again. What do you think is the significance of verse 3 in the light of the whole passage? What do you think Peter was saying in verse 8? Can you relate? What do you think he was saying in verse 9?

2- What were the disciples arguing about in Luke 22:24-27? Why do you think they picked this time to do that?

3- Write out Matthew 20:26-28 in your own words. What do you think Jesus was saying in verse 28? How ought that to impact our approach to the church?

## Agape Grace: A Heart to Serve

4- Read I Corinthians 15:10. How could it all be of grace when Paul said he was laboring more abundantly than all? Can you find the balanced Christian life in this verse?

### A Challenge to Further Application

1- What kinds of tasks can you think of in today's church life that would be as menial as foot-washing? If you were given the opportunity do something menial for a beggar, what would your response be? If someone comes into your church who seems to be poorly clothed and obviously in need, what is your normal response? Do you make an effort to befriend them? Do you look the other way? Do you pray that somebody else will greet them so you can escape?

2- Why do you think Jesus picked this particular time to wash the disciples' feet? What do you think He was saying to us?

3- Are you a leader in any kind of ministry? In a Bible Study? In your home? How can you set the example for others to follow in ministering to those in need? What specific things can you do this week? Write them down and ask someone to help you become accountable.

4- Pray and ask God to give you the desire to love those less loveable, and ask for the grace, when given the opportunity, to let His enabling power love them through you. Expect it to happen. Thank Him when it does.

### A Challenge to Scripture Memory

Memorize I Corinthians 15:10, II Corinthians 9:8, and John 13:17.

**dtm** DISCIPLESHIP TAPE MINISTRIES, INC.

10602 Mossbank, San Antonio, TX 78230

210-226-0000 or 1-800-375-7778

www.dtm.org • dtm@dtm.org • © Russell Kelfer

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