

An Invitation to Grace in Life Together



***The Message spoken by Brad Scheelke
at the Wedding of
Eli Brayley & Bethanie Kline***

June 23, 2012

Family and friends,

Eli and Bethanie have asked me to speak words of blessing and remembrance to them that they might see more clearly and remember more consistently the goodness of marriage that our good God has created, and they are freely choosing to enter. They are both overjoyed that you have joined the festivities. I have had the privilege of working closely with Eli the past several years and sharing much of life with him. The Kline family has become dear to my heart as we have talked much together of God's great love for sinners. I have sweet anticipation of much deeper acquaintance with the Kline and Brayley families as the years go by. I suspect

that you, like I, desire for Eli and Bethanie to learn to love, bless and serve one another ever more as time rushes on. They truly want to invite you into close relationship with them as their God has gladly welcomed them into intimacy with Him. They want you to listen in as I share with them some words of God's vision of the goodness of marriage. Feel free to make application to yourself as you listen.

Eli and Bethanie, lets look back together at how God has so wonderfully blessed you to prepare your minds and hearts for marriage. Remember back several years to when you both outwardly said that God was good and generous, but in your minds you thought—or maybe you even said aloud—that God required you and everyone else to offer Him some moral improvement or at least a little commitment to change, before He would open His heart and give you His grace. You said that God so loved the world that He sent His son to die the death you deserved so that you could have eternal life. You said many things like this, and Eli, you even preached such with passion at universities across the country. You said that God is generous, but you mocked His generosity by saying that He was not yet ready to be generous—not until a person was serious about changing. Oh how God loved you and was patient with you—not destroying you for such blasphemy. All that while you mocked Him, His heart was wide open toward you. He was smiling and waiting for you to hear His voice. As that wonderful hymn declares:

*I heard the voice of Jesus say,
"Behold, I freely give The living water;
thirsty one, stoop down, and drink, and live."
I came to Jesus, and I drank of that life giving stream;
My thirst was quenched, my soul revived,
and now I live in Him.*

Remember how you felt relief and joy to realize that God was already generous—that the door into His goodness already stood wide open because God Himself had paid the full price for you to be in a good and pure relationship with Him. You were surprised to find that the water of life that He called you to drink had been right next to you all the time. His voice said rest, drink and live, but somehow your mind twisted those sweet words to mean strive to be good and stop your sinning. Remember Eli that night when your own preaching came to haunt you? You, a grand hypocrite, who preached hell to others, came to see that you deserved it too and it awaited you. Remember how you felt that huge weight lift off your chest the moment God opened your eyes to see that His grace was not controlled by your worthiness. You had begged and begged Him to be generous, but upon realizing that He wanted to be generous to you, you trusted His joyful invitation to rest in the death of Christ as all you needed, and peace flooded in like a river. Remember that you both found God glad to receive you as sinners. He did not shake his finger at you for mocking His generosity or for being so slow to learn. Now remember back to why you hesitated to give up on your own righteousness. Was it because God had not spoken clearly enough? Certainly not. His voice cries out continually in all of our consciences. Your problem was that your mind was blinded, so that you misunderstood the righteous cry of your conscience to do good and to do good always. You fooled yourselves into thinking that you could be partly good and that God's generosity could be bought.

You misunderstood the heart of God. He is always righteous, perfectly good and lavishly generous. He was that way before the creation of the universe. That is just who He is all the time. All of us sense painfully His righteousness in our consciences. But we are easily

intimidated by shallow thinking to conclude that we or others can or must satisfy the righteousness that we feel by striving to be good. To be good is very wonderful, but a little deeper meditation reveals that goodness cannot be partial. To be good at all one must be perfectly good. A machine can be a mixture of good and bad parts but a person cannot be reduced to parts and therefore is good in total or not at all. We were all born with a self-centered mindset, so much so that we rarely notice it in ourselves. It is ironic and even comical that we are often offended in seeing this in others while being insensitive to it in ourselves. As a result we are blind to what is at the heart of a truly good person. And what is that? It is exactly what you mocked about God—His grace or righteous generosity.

God at the core is a lavishly generous person. Since we were made in His image, we all have a sense of generosity. But because we are born gripped by selfishness, that generosity gets twisted in our minds. From my observation, I would suspect that every person in every culture has at sometime had the experience of wanting to give a gift to a person, who, because of his or her pride, could not take it freely, and instead offered something in return, like a small payment or a promise of future reciprocation. The transaction proceeds with the gift being in reality a trade or purchase, and the goodness and freeness of gift-giving being perverted. People have told me that they feel insulted when others won't accept their generosity. Haven't we all felt that? In feeling offended like this, we have lied to ourselves, because a truly generous person is never offended at being rejected, but is gladly patient, longing to bless the other. You, like I, assumed that God was like we are and wanted your trade or payment to get His gift. You didn't even notice your twisted thinking. Isn't it interesting that even the secular world says that a good judge who takes bribes is not actually good. And don't we all suspect that nearly every person who says this, will, when found guilty of wrong doing in court, want the judge to compromise justice? We all have thought that God was like us. But thankfully He isn't. He is truly always consistent in His righteous grace—so much so that in Him, and because of Him, life swallows up death.

Remember how God created us to be in a relationship of goodness and peace with Him. Before the world began, He saw ahead and made a way for sinners to live in righteousness with Him in peace and joy—not a perverted righteousness or unsettled peace, but that of true goodness. The Old Testament is a shocking record of the pride, hatred, manipulation and violence of man against man as we judged each other by human performance. But it is also filled with words of God's loving-kindness, patience and provision for sinners who distrusted or even mocked Him. Sometimes His judgment fell, but not predictably and rarely hurriedly. For four thousand years God waited patiently to reveal at the right time to sinful humanity the heart of true goodness. Then suddenly angels appeared and sang for joy. Not only had the Messiah come, but the unimaginable surprise was that in Christ, God Himself had come full of grace and truth. He was not distant from sinners. He made the first move to identify with us in our sin and rebellion. Our generous God came Himself, to die the death we deserved, that He might swallow up our death with His life. All the condemnation, harshness and disappointment of God concerning our sin, was poured out on Christ—on the cross. Christ was the gladdest man who ever lived, and yet God was pleased to crush Him for our sins. This tells us that the God who is slandered as uncaring or vengeful, is actually lavishly generous, self-sacrificial, patient, unwaveringly good and righteous, and full of joy. This is truly how life swallows up death.

The reason I have called you to remember the glory of God's surprising generosity at the cross, is because God has made marriage to be a revelation of Himself, and a picture of His

relationship to to His people. Marriage is a relationship between a man and a woman—a relationship of pure goodness and generosity, free from competition, pride and manipulation. As you choose to enter into marriage, you are saying yes to what God created to be good. There is, and will be, intense pressure from your own minds and from the world around you, to judge each other by so-called human generosity which is tainted by checklists and performance. A checklist is anything you think another person must do to avoid your displeasure. We are all weak people who perceive the good things we should do, but are very easily distracted by the failures of ourselves and others. So I declare to you boldly that God's grace is an inseparable intertwining of goodness, righteousness and generosity, and the degree to which you see each other through the eyes of this grace will be reflected in the peace, contentment and joy in your marriage—or lack thereof. Let me say it again so that you don't miss it. God's grace is an inseparable intertwining of goodness, righteousness and generosity, and the degree to which you see each other through the eyes of this grace will be reflected in the peace, contentment and joy in your marriage. Grace paints a very beautiful picture. Let it be what fills your marriage with color. You will enjoy it, and we will enjoy being with you as we watch you paint.

I would like to offer you three practical reminders to help you thrive in grace in your marriage.

The first reminder is a simple one but one that is very easily forgotten and not well understood. It is this: You are not God—neither one of you. Period. That was simple to say, but do you really catch what it means? God is the creator of all goodness and He alone is the judge of sinners. Sin is so serious in His sight that He does not entrust any of us to be the sin police or prosecuting attorney—for ourselves or anyone else. Of course you know this, but will you remember it when the pressure is on? The Bible describes Christ as our advocate and Satan as the accuser. Marriage is a relationship of real intimacy and is the place that most easily reveals whether or not you see goodness as pure. It is very difficult to be a hypocrite at home as home is where hypocrites can't hide. We all find ourselves sinning more than we would like. Decide today that you will not be surprised by your own sin or that of each other.

The real question for you, Eli, is this: When Bethanie sins, especially when it is against you, will you think and speak for the defense or for the prosecution? And you, Bethanie: When Eli sins against you, will you think and speak for the defense or for the prosecution? This is not a matter of pretending that sin is trivial or didn't happen, but rather seeing how deadly serious even the tiniest of sins is. Eli, God saw all Bethanie's sins in perfect clarity, sent His Son to the cross to die the death she deserved; and He was glad to do it. Did you catch that? God loved Bethanie so much that He was glad to suffer for every one of her sins and He did it without any complaining, finger-pointing or rolling His eyes. Any suffering you may bear as a result of her sin is trivial compared to the cross. Your suffering doesn't gain her forgiveness from God —she already has that. The question is simple: Will you think God's way and let the death of Christ be all that Bethanie needs to be perfectly accepted by God and by you? There is no question of God's acceptance of her, but will you choose God's way of righteous grace or the way of checklist acceptance? And Bethanie, will you think this way about Eli? We men can be insensitive or worse at the least opportunity. I don't mean to pop your bubble before you say “I do”, but Eli will get plenty of practice at confessing his sins. His confessions will flow more freely and honestly when you don't pressure him. It is all so simple: let God be the judge and you be a helper to the defense team. You may be tempted to promise to always remember, but this is not a commitment to make, but a mindset to practice. God calls you to it. God will

always think generously toward you, even if you don't think generously toward each other. You can pretend to be judges and yell and scream at each other. You can deny goodness and be hypocrites, but God can never deny Himself.

The second reminder builds on the first. Remember that God always judges by moral perfection, requires all people to be purely good, and will never lower that standard for anyone. Lowering the standard, even slightly, not only misrepresents God's character, but is immoral and makes you a judge with a checklist. This is a rather ugly thing indeed, as it leads to harshness, destroys motivation and never brings real freedom to relationships. Eli, remember the two things that our dear agnostic friend told us about this: First, that checklists create hypocrites, and second, that judging by perfection requires you to find a new way to live other than by standards. Remember how his comments led to wonderful conversation about how that new way to live is by righteous grace. Eli, also please remember the humorous little saying you taught me recently. Bethanie, you have heard it too and have begun to practice. It will be a great asset in learning to consistently fix your mind on perfection. Eli, when you notice being mistreated by Bethanie, say aloud to yourself something like: She should not have done that; she should have been perfect! And Bethanie, when you notice being mistreated by Eli, say aloud to yourself something like: How could he have done that, God requires him to be perfect! This will remind you of how goodness is perfect, and you will find yourself laughing at your own failure, which should lead you quickly back to the cross and glad confession of sin.

The third reminder is about that new way. Eli, you preached through Ephesians two years ago. Remember what you preached then, and still tell people often now, that the first three chapters are filled with descriptions of the wonderful riches every Christian has in Christ. Here are a few examples applied to Bethanie. She already has every spiritual blessing in the heavenlies in Christ. She already is blameless before God in His love. She already is alive in Christ and seated with Him in the heavenlies. All hostility between her and God has already been removed and Christ Himself is her peace. And this is just the beginning of her blessings.

In those first three chapters there is only one command to keep. It is in chapter two, verse eleven. It is commonly overlooked as trivial or as too obvious to need attention. But it is the key to the whole of the Christian life and the key to a marriage filled with contentment, peace and joy, no matter the circumstances. What is it, and will you take it seriously even if no one else does? First, remember what comes right before it. Ephesians 2:8-10 declare:

For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast. For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.

I want to remind you of what you preach to others about this. Works are mentioned three times: 1) Salvation, or complete acceptance with God, is by faith apart from personal works so that all pride is removed. 2) Then, Christ does His work to recreate us and set us right with God. 3) Lastly God had designed the Christian life to be one marked by good works. You tell others that God welcomes a person solely on the basis of their trust in Christ's finished work on the cross. You then tell them that the assurance of God's love for them naturally results in good works. Do you really believe this? I know that you do. That will not

be an issue in your marriage. What will be an issue will be how well you lead your family to obey that important command in the next verse. Verse eleven begins with these two words: Therefore remember. *Remembering* is one of the most important words in the Bible and *forgetting* is one of the most tragic. Why remember? That is because God has done all the work for our full salvation.

What does the text tell us to remember? The passage describes at length first of all, how you and the rest of us were alienated from God and had no hope in the world; secondly, how Christ's death did all the work to make us right with God; and thirdly, how gloriously rich is our right standing and life with God.

The choice will be yours, Eli. Will you learn to lead your family to be marked by remembering together the glorious riches all saints have in Christ? And will you gladly thank all people who remind you of these simple things? Or will you be just another unapproachable preacher whom people hesitate to remind because they commonly reply with, "I already know that"? When Bethanie wrongs you, or is upset at someone else who wrongs her, or is simply self-condemning, will you give her a checklist of what she should do or stop doing? Or will you remind her of God's great love for her as well as for the person who hurt her, or of how God has no harshness or displeasure toward her as Christ has carried it all? Will you remember that God has counted all Bethanie's sins against Christ and that He remembers them no more, so that you will be moved to correct her gently and without finger pointing? And Bethanie, will you remember that God sees Eli's sins very clearly and yet always smiles on him? Then you too will see his sin very clearly and yet rejoice that he is accepted fully by the blood of the lamb. As you remember what God has done for Eli in Christ, you will find yourself drawn toward Eli—in spite of the rejection or pain he may have just given you—drawn to him desiring simply to bless him by reminding him of God's great love at the cross. The unlimited power for you to love Eli like this is fueled solely by putting your mind on the sin-bearing love of Christ. Listen closely both of you. Please remember that when you think of God's love at the cross—a love that gladly bore the death we all deserved— then your heart will naturally open toward offenders and violators so that it will be natural and automatic to gladly forgive, serve and bless each other. Marriage is a wonderful place to practice remembering what you already know to be true. It is not a commitment to be made but a simple moment by moment choice to see each other—and frankly all other people— through grace. I suggest that you both become experts at meditation on the power of the cross.

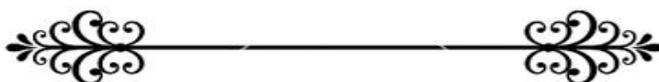
These three reminders are really part of a seamless whole view of life. Hear them again. First, that you are not God and therefore obviously not the judge or prosecutor of one another's sin. Second, that God always judges by perfection and is never lenient with anyone, including you two. Lastly, that the new way to live is by motivation fueled by a vision of the sin-bearing love of God. Remember that I stated that our God is motivated purely by grace, and that I declared grace to be lavish generosity in pure righteousness and goodness. So these three reminders turn out to be simply the imitation of Christ at His deepest level of being. This is beyond you when you think about human performance. But it is natural when you contemplate the cross. So forgetfulness will be your great enemy and is the greatest source of trauma among Christians everywhere: in marriages, in families and in the church at large.

Eli, when you forget how Bethanie is already perfectly righteous in God's sight because of the death of His dear Son, then and only then, will you sin against her. If she ever has an irritated, angry or harsh reaction to your mistreatment of her, it will be because of, and only

because of, her forgetfulness of the precious blood of Christ which has already cleansed you. And Bethanie, don't be afraid that your sin will be too great for God or Eli to handle. Eli may forget and get impatient with you, but all God's displeasure toward you and Eli was expressed at the cross long before either of you ever sinned. All the self-condemning thoughts you will ever have will be simply because you forgot to remember God's grace toward you. Bethanie, Eli much needs your continual and frequent reminders of God's love for him at the cross. Eli, Bethanie really needs her life to be full of your tender reminders of how she is perfectly accepted and free from all condemnation by that same sin-bearing love. Fear, coldness, harshness, and all other sinful reactions are simply symptoms of forgetting the way of grace in life. Grace always wins because it is an open heart that always seeks to bless. And because it is pure righteousness and goodness, it is never intimidated by evil.

I suggest that the easiest way to exclude forgetfulness from your life together is to fill your minds and hearts with thankfulness focused on the way of life that swallows up death. Cultivate a marriage filled with thankfulness for the wonderful riches you and others have in Christ. Even thank God for the blessing of critics. Every criticism you will ever receive will be merely an aid to help you notice where your mind is: either on generosity or on performance.

Don't you want your mind to be on grace? Doesn't God deeply love your critics? So what is the problem? The sky is the limit when you focus your thankfulness on heaven. This will make your home a place of refuge for those who feel the heaviness of this world. All of them, like you, need to hear again and again how God is so glad to welcome sinners as sinners simply because He is generous. God calls you to this open-hearted lavish generosity toward each other day by day, moment by moment. This is how to experience the goodness of marriage as God intended it to be. I have high hopes for you two, and am glad to be a partaker with you in that love which always swallows up death.



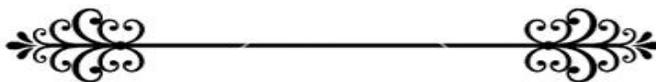
Dear family and friends,

Eli and Bethanie would like me to extend to you an invitation to join them in grace in life together. Whether you are a Christian or not, they invite you deeper into relationship with them. They gladly declare today that you are welcome whether you choose to thank them or criticize them. They also want you to know that any hesitation on their part to fully embrace you will be all their fault for forgetting how much their God loves you. Christ died your death as well as theirs, and the life they now live in His lavish generosity, they wish you to flourish in.

To those of you who openly declare doubt, distrust, or hostility toward God, they declare that they are very glad to know you and encourage you to listen to the voice of your own conscience which calls you to live and judge by perfect goodness and hounds you when you don't. Your mind, like theirs, tempts you to suppress that voice of pure goodness so as to honor self above goodness. Join them in looking up to moral perfection and you will find your mind surprised by the sight of generosity as the only hope for life. And generosity is purely

personal; it cannot arise from impersonal matter or laws of physics. To those of you Christians who are feeling discouraged about your own sins or are troubled by the mistreatment that you have received from others, say from a: husband, wife, child, parent, so-called friend, neighbor, boss, fellow Christian, or even God—to you, Eli and Bethanie extend that same invitation to move your mind to perfect goodness. Only for you, it is a restoration of the vision that you once had. Remember how this vision first showed you that you were a helpless sinner. Suddenly you realized that God was generous, not merely lenient, in sending His dear Son to die in your place. In taking His gift of perfect acceptance, you realized that all people were in that same predicament. Remember how you testified that God gladly welcomed you without any good works because Christ's finished work on the cross was what fully pleased God. To you Eli and Bethanie speak this gentle and glad word: Remember what you first believed. Remember grace. Remember it for yourself and remember it for those who have hurt you. Remember that your tiniest moral failing as well as their tiniest sin deserved death. Remember that the only reason God didn't crush us all upon our first sin is because He is a God of love who is righteous and lavishly generous. Don't deny your sin or theirs; see it clearly and put the blame where it belongs—at the foot of the cross. God's heart has always been wide open to all sinners with Jesus' words on the cross still declaring that boldly. “Father forgive them,” He cried, asking God to lay all the blame of mankind to His charge. Remember that these words are the only hope for you and for those who hurt you. And as you remember, you will find yourself naturally content to wash the feet of those who kick you in the teeth—just as Christ still does for you.

Lastly, to all of you, Eli and Bethanie request that you remind them often of these things— whenever you desire—for they are painfully aware of their temptation to forget. Please join me in stirring them to remembrance that we may share in the sweetness of grace in life together. Let's start today.



Brad Scheelke has worked at Oasis Books and lived in Logan, Utah for over 25 years. He is glad to live in a religious culture where conversation about the important issues of life is easily had and usually welcomed.

Below is a list of good reading material for a higher vision of God as good, perfectly righteous, full of delight, and lavishly generous. Grace (unmerited favor) and desire for community overflow from us as we see God as One who invites people into life that swallows up death. This is especially needful in the USA, in a culture that worships individualism, personal peace and affluence.

- We Would See Jesus by Roy Hession
Revolutionary Love* by Festo Kivengere
Thankfulness and Confession* pamphlet by Brad Scheelke
Counterfeit Grace*pamphlet by Eli Brayley
How to be Free From Bitterness* pamphlet by Jim Wilson
God’s Way of Peace* by Horatius Bonar
Classic Christianity by Bob George
The Scandal of Jesus booklet by Vinoth Ramachandra
Jesus Plus Nothing Equals Everything by Tullian Tchividjian
Another Hand on Mine* by William Petersen
Out of the Black Shadowsby Stephen Lungu
Patricia St. John Tells Her Own Story*
Agape Leadership by Peterson & Strauch
Evidence Not Seen by Darlene Deibler Rose
To End All Wars by Ernest Gordon

For academic readers:

- The Death of Christ by James Denney
The Christian Doctrine of Reconciliation by James Denney
The Great Meaning of Metanoia..... by Treadwell Walden

Note: *indicates our publication or difficult to find.



If you desire conversation, further information, or are interested in the above titles, please contact me at:

Oasis Books • 25 West Center • Logan UT 84321 • (435)753-8697
OasisBooksLogan.com
Brad@OasisBooksOutreach.com