

# RICHARD BLACKABY

FOREWORD BY HENRY BLACKABY

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## PUTTING A FACE ON GRACE

LIVING A LIFE WORTH PASSING ON



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FACE ON  
GRACE

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RICHARD  
BLACKABY

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*To my parents*

who not only taught me about grace  
but continue to model it before me daily.

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## FOREWORD

*by Henry Blackaby*

**R**EVIVAL TARRIES for the lack of people experiencing and expressing God's grace. God intended that His grace would be life transforming. To truly know God's grace is to pass it on to others. Withholding grace from others begs the question whether one has any idea of the magnitude of God's merciful love.

This book is both exquisitely practical and intensely convicting. It blends the "knowing" and the "doing" into a vital message that must be taken seriously by both Christians and non-Christians.

It is not too late for revival if God's people will fully receive and dispense God's grace. The wisdom found on these pages is a timely step in the right direction.

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God blessed me with a team of special friends (Ross and Phyllis Lincer, Lou Leventhal, Hermann Brandt, and Barry Nelson) who squeezed time into their full schedules to read through the manuscript and offer wise and insightful suggestions. You all know me well and were able to help me express the things God laid on my heart. Your friendship and encouragement is one of God's many grace gifts to me.

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## INTRODUCTION

*I* ONCE HAD A UNIVERSITY professor who performed a mischievous experiment on his class. He gave a midterm exam, marked the tests, and recorded the grades. Then he randomly chose eight exams and on the front page of each one he wrote a number 10 percent *lower* than the actual grade he had already recorded. On another eight tests, he put a grade 10 percent *higher* than the students' actual scores. He returned the exams at the close of the next class. The following week, he confessed his scheme and reported that eight of the sixteen students had contacted him to point out his "mistake." You can guess which eight they were. Those who received more than they deserved were conspicuously silent. Not one recipient of the bonus 10 percent had spoken up, but all eight shortchanged students were prompt to lodge a grievance. That's human nature.

We gladly accept what is freely given, but we are wary of those who would take advantage of us.

There is a story told about William Fleming, a successful Texas

businessman. He explained to his pastor that since he was now earning millions of dollars in oil revenue, he could no longer afford to give a tithe (10 percent of his gross income) to God through his local church. He explained that his assets were not liquid and then delved into tax implications. His pastor sympathized and told Fleming he could see the dilemma. The pastor then promised to earnestly beseech God to reduce Fleming's income to a level from which he could once again afford to tithe. Fleming got the point. He eventually became a generous philanthropist who enjoyed giving millions of dollars to numerous Christian causes.

Many of us can relate to Fleming's conundrum: the more we have, the harder it becomes for us to give. And money isn't the only

*Many believers withhold from others the very gift they so readily continue to receive—the gift of grace.*



area we struggle in. I have the privilege of traveling to scores of cities and numerous countries. I meet hundreds of wonderful Christians who have been marvelously saved by God's grace. They testify to God's patience in pursuing them as they pursued sin. They tell of God's loving persistence though they continually rejected Him. Yet, without realizing it, many of these grateful

believers withhold from others the very gift they so readily continue to receive—the gift of grace.

No windfall or inheritance comes close to the blessing we receive when we accept God's free gift of eternal life. You would think after receiving such undeserved grace, we would be generous toward others. Yet the opposite is often true. Christians can be the most graceless, judgmental people on earth. This is the paradox of graceless Christians.

Recently I visited with a fine couple after a service where I was

the guest speaker. I had preached several times at their church and we had struck up a friendly relationship. They are dear people, with a glorious testimony of God's faithfulness to them. That Sunday, my sermon was about God's grace. I shared how God doesn't focus on unimportant things, but rather He lovingly helps us become more like Christ.

After the service, this couple immediately approached me. They were both visibly shaken. "You were God's messenger to us today," they said, and they told me their story. Their teenage daughter was causing them great frustration, and the situation had reached a boiling point. They had determined to confront her that very day to insist she move out until she "got her act together." They were preparing for a showdown as soon as they got home.

One could just picture the scene: this dear man and woman up against a petulant, defiant, multipierced, tattooed girl in a black tee shirt peppered with skulls and crossbones. But I had met their daughter. She was nothing like that. She had graduated from high school that spring. With half the summer gone, she still did not know which college to attend nor did she have a clear direction for her life.

The reason they had not confronted her sooner was that she had been on a mission trip to Central America with her church youth group. Their daughter was a vivacious extrovert. She loved her church and she enjoyed doing mission work. She was somewhat disorganized and allegedly not a neat freak, but she was a great kid. She didn't use drugs. She wasn't hanging out with the wrong crowd. She loved Jesus and wanted to serve Him. She just didn't know how or where yet.

That morning God gently lifted the veil from her parents' eyes. They realized they had become so absorbed in their daughter's

shortcomings they were oblivious to the truth that in all of the important categories, she had made them very proud. The mother emotionally admitted, “If you had not preached on what you did today, we would have gone home and thrown our daughter out of our house.” That fall their daughter enrolled in a Christian university and continues to faithfully serve the Lord.

These were not bad parents. They were wonderful Christians and solid church members. They had simply lost sight of grace. While they eagerly accepted all the grace God was showering on them, they had denied grace to their own precious daughter. They

*I could tell story after story  
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were stunned by what they had almost done. But they shouldn't have been. It happens all the time. I could tell story after story about good people who somewhere along their spiritual journey lost the wonder of God's grace.

To be honest, I could recount many stories about how *I* have been stingy with God's limitless grace. At times, I, too, have been a graceless Christian. I have received so much, and yet it pained me to give even a little. I have relied daily on God's forgiveness and mercy, yet I blithely looked the other way when people needed grace from me. I am writing this book not because I am an expert on grace, but because I have been a major recipient of God's forgiveness and favor. Over the years God, in His grace, has redeemed my failures and taught me about His love and grace. These are the lessons I want to pass on to you.

I want to share the phenomenal way God can renew your heart and mind to make you a conduit of grace. You can become a generous grace-giver in ways you never imagined. And you will find

yourself sharing Christ's love with people who have never been on your radar screen. That's what being Christlike is about. As you read this book, open your heart to the metamorphosis God wants to perform in your life.

*Note:* At times throughout this book, people's names have been changed to protect their privacy.

# 1

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## THE PARADOX OF GRACELESS CHRISTIANS

*S*OMETIMES MY TRAVEL schedule can get pretty stressful. Last year I was flying to Jackson, Mississippi, to preach at a church, passing through Denver on my way. When I arrived in Denver, everyone in the airport seemed to be in a bad mood. There were frowns on most faces. As I approached the gate to board the plane, I heard an announcement that the gate had been changed to one at the opposite end of the terminal. A small herd of disgruntled passengers wearily arose and trudged to the new gate. They were not happy travelers! One couple was having a heated argument. Two sets of parents were snapping at their children. One elderly man was muttering to anyone who would listen (no one was).

Then the agent announced that the gate had been changed once again. Now the crowd was in danger of degenerating into a lynch mob. By the time I arrived at the third gate, no seats were

available in the waiting area. I stood leaning against a wall. Suddenly there was another announcement, but this one was for *me*. “May I please have your attention? Would a Richard Black-Baby please see the ticket agent?”

Now *I* was annoyed. These airline employees truly were incompetent. They couldn’t even pronounce a simple English name like *Blackaby*. I marched up to the desk. “I’m Richard BLACKABY,” I said. “That’s ‘Bee’ as in bumble.” The agent asked for my ticket so I handed it to him.

*“I hope you don’t mind if we  
upgrade you to business class,”  
he said with a smile.*

Without batting an eye, he ripped it in two. “We need your seat,” he explained matter-of-factly. Then he handed me a business-class ticket. “I hope you don’t mind if we upgrade you to business class,” he said with a smile. Suddenly the sun

came out and I could hear birds singing. Everything was going to be okay. “Richard Black-Baby at your service,” I said. “And God bless us, every one!”

The moment they announced that business class could board, I scurried to find my place. It was a large, comfortable seat, and I quickly settled in. I watched exhausted travelers and bedraggled parents muttering instructions to their kids as they made their way to the cramped recesses at the rear of the plane, and I lifted a prayer of thanks to God that I did not have to pass “behind the veil” with them. We had a cheerful flight attendant who continually asked, “What else can I bring you?” I had already gulped down a soft drink, a bottle of water, and a cup of coffee before we even taxied to the runway.

As soon as we were airborne, our Johnny-on-the-spot flight attendant was asking me whether I would prefer sirloin tips or

salmon. Both were a far cry from the offerings a few rows behind me: stale pretzels or no stale pretzels.

As time passed I overheard a disturbing conversation between a woman across the aisle and our flight attendant. This passenger had been called to the podium shortly after I was and she, too, had been upgraded. It seemed she was not as enamored with her good fortune as I was. When told what brand of coffee they served on the plane, she said, “Oh, I can’t stand that stuff!” When the flight attendant told her he did not have the necessary ingredients to mix the drink she requested, she snapped, “Well, what *do* you have then?” When she took her first bite of salmon, she spit it out, complaining it wasn’t fresh.

I couldn’t believe my ears. I wanted to stand up and say something to her. I knew she should be choking down twisted little pieces of salted, baked dough, not eating salmon. I knew the overworked flight attendants in the economy coach were far too busy to give her the polite attention our smiling steward was giving us. I wanted to ask this woman, after all that had been done for her, how she could possibly complain. How could she be demanding and impatient with someone who was trying so hard to help her? Of course I didn’t say a word. I had already watched her make mincemeat out of our courteous flight attendant.

#### UPGRADED CHRISTIANS

Christians are people who have been more than upgraded. We were headed to one destination and God rerouted us to a vastly better place (Ephesians 2:3–10). We were traveling with limited, perishable resources. Now we have the Holy Spirit guiding us to receive everything God has prepared for us (1 Corinthians 2:9–16).

We were alienated from God; now we are children of the King, with access to all the treasures of God's kingdom (Ephesians 2:7, 13). We were living in defeat; now we are assured of victory. We used to rely on our own strength and wisdom. Now almighty God walks with us day by day. We used to stumble in darkness; now we walk in the light. We were spiritually dead and now we are alive. Christianity is truly a miracle of enormous magnitude.

### GRACELESS CHRISTIANS

Yet, like my malcontented fellow traveler, many Christians have lost the wonder of what God's grace has done for them. Tragically, they have fallen into a debilitating sense of self-centered entitlement, behaving as if God exists solely to serve them and to make them happy. These people forget how hopeless their situation was before God rescued them by His grace. They overlook the fact God is not obligated to redeem them or to walk with them daily or to answer their prayers or even to continue loving them when they act intolerably.

*While "Amazing Grace" may  
be a popular hymn among  
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Our generation may be one of the most self-centered in history. There is a chronic condition in our society that is far more widespread than is generally acknowledged. It affects most Christians. Its causes are difficult to understand but its symptoms are obvious. And it seems to be contagious. It is perplexing to witness. It is as inexcusable as it is pervasive. It contradicts the very purpose of Christ's death on the cross. It is the paradoxical epidemic of graceless Christianity.

A baffling reality is that the richest people in the world can be some of the stingiest tightwads. Those who have the most can be the least willing to show generosity to others. While “Amazing Grace” may be a popular hymn among millions of believers, it is not the lifestyle of choice for many. Consider just a few examples of graceless Christians:

- People complain they “got nothing out of the service” because the worship leader did not schedule any of their favorite hymns.
- Members angrily leave the church because the pastor changed the format of the service.
- Believers become resentful toward God because He did not answer their prayers the way they wanted Him to.
- People leave the church auditorium promptly at the twelve o’clock hour whether the pastor is finished speaking or not.
- Church leaders are slandered by people who have been “overlooked” for prominent positions.
- Two Christians refuse to forgive one another.
- Members leave the church because the pastor talks too much about giving.
- Christian parents refuse to speak to their adult son or daughter because he or she did not heed their advice.

#### A GRACELESS PRODIGAL

Do you know people who have forgotten how much they depend on God’s grace? They are all around you. John grew up in a Christian home. He professed faith in Christ as a child and regularly attended church with his family. But during his teenage

years, he became a full-fledged rebel. He pursued whatever pleasures the world offered. He indulged in drugs and drinking and he ran around with the “bad” crowd. He broke his parents’ hearts. They reasoned with him and argued with him. They pled with him and prayed for him. Yet it seemed he would never abandon his destructive ways. After several years of hard, wild living, he finally hit rock bottom and came to his senses, turned to God, and returned to church. John was back, with a vengeance.

This former prodigal became the most faithful church member. He had his family in church at every opportunity. But a strange thing happened to John in his return to God—he forgot about grace. He became a legalist. He was judgmental toward those who did not measure up to his standards of righteousness. He would frequently chastise his pastor for not using more scripture in his sermons or for not preaching vehemently enough against sin. He was vocal in church business meetings, freely pointing out where he felt the church and its members were in error. Some people refused to serve on church committees because they feared John’s interrogations during congregational business sessions. John spent Sunday afternoons dissecting the church and its members, exposing their shortcomings to his family.

There was trouble at home, too. John ran his household with an iron fist. He had seen firsthand the pain caused by teenage rebellion, so he aggressively prepared for that eventuality with his own kids. He established a formidable set of rules and curfews along with strict punishments for infractions. His children discovered they could never fully please their father. Always afraid of letting down his guard, John was vigilant to be firm and authoritative with his kids. As John’s children became teenagers, they responded to his domineering parenting style by concealing their struggles and fail-

This is where the Christian church has been vulnerable for centuries. Christians erroneously assumed that once they were believers, their thoughts and words were acceptable to God. Those outside the Christian faith can see the flaw in this thinking. What is traditionally the greatest complaint by unbelievers about the church? “It is full of *hypocrites*.” The church is filled with people who claim to be children of God but sometimes they live like children of the devil. This fact prompted the apostle Paul’s exhortation to “work out your own salvation with fear and trembling” (Philippians 2:12). Paul knew a godly character does not happen instantaneously. Salvation is instant but becoming like Jesus is a process. It is something a person intentionally embraces and pursues.

## CONCLUSION

I like to be a positive person. I try not to dwell on the negative. So far, this book has presented a pretty dismal assessment of people in general and Christians in particular. But now comes the best part. I hope to help you identify areas in your life that have not yet been thoroughly sanctified by Christ. I hope to share truths that will encourage you to grow as a person of grace. I pray this book will motivate you and help you learn to talk and act more like Jesus. God can transform your life so you give hope and blessing to others. This is not only possible, it is God’s desire for you and for me.

Now that we’ve examined the problem, let’s go on to the solution. Let’s discover how God intends to transform us and to make us His conduits of grace to others.



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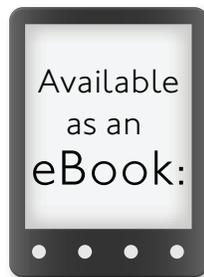
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