

Introduction – Read and Report: *In the Grip of Grace* – Max Lucado

By Brian A Schulz

*“For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves,
it is the gift of God.” Ephesians 2:8 (NASB)*

The concept of grace is one that is often misunderstood or even devalued by many today in Christendom. The English word “grace” appears 131 times in the New American Standard Bible. One might or might not evaluate this number as a significant topic due to the sheer number of mentions. However, this number doesn’t even begin to scratch the surface as this theme is of utmost importance. In his book, *In the Grip of Grace*, Max Lucado expounds of this lofty subject matter in a fashion that is both attention-grabbing and understandable. In the course of his exposition of this truly vital subject Lucado has succeeded in conveying some of the invaluable truths which allow the Christian to have security in salvation like no other religion can begin to match. The evaluation of this text has provided me with the opportunity to gather some new insights, to obtain some useful tools and ideas for my ministry, to foster some disappointments with certain positions, and finally, to continue have some questions which remain unanswered. Therefore, it is the aspiration of this brief report to comment on the four previously mentioned areas of evaluation.

New and Different Ways of Thinking – *In the Grip of Grace*

Lucado begins this work with a “parable” which serves as the tie that binds the book as a whole. In this parable he describes the types of people which exist in the world and specifically how they attempt to relate to God. Some chose to deny His existence living for today, some attempt to work their way to Him, some ridicule others as a way to exalt themselves, while some

rely on God to provide the way and trust wholly on Him. He terms these as the hedonist, the legalist, the judgmentalist, and lastly, the grace driven Christian.

I am well aware of the mentality of many people in and out of the Church who believe “good works” are their ticket to heaven. In fact, it might be the most predominant mindset of the four categories laid forth by Lucado. Lucado brings out an interesting result of this mindset which I hadn’t previously considered. He explains the impact of the attempt to reach God by accumulating a vast amount of good works. This impact is described as leaving the “legalist” with a state of despair or arrogance. As he stated, “They either give up or become stuck up.”¹ Another interesting view that was brought out was the idea of godlessness. This word defined is actually worse than disdain for God. This is actually life minus God which results in God becoming completely irrelevant. One of the most interesting points that comes forth in this book is summed up in this statement; “the loss of mystery has led to the loss of majesty.”² While explaining the plight of living godlessly, Lucado relates a paradox which should lead people to God and not away from Him. The more we have learned about the universe and all it contains, the more we have moved away from its creator. People have become so enamored with the discovery itself that they have forgotten to give proper due to THE creator. The more we have come to know the less we have come to worship; an unfortunate state of affairs. How one can look at the night sky or the intricacies of the “simple” cell and remain unmoved remains a mystery to me. An additional new viewpoint brought to my attention was the idea that mankind really has two choices concerning the process of salvation. There are not many ways which man attempts to gain salvation. There are simply two. Quoting John MacArthur, Lucado writes; “As far as the way of salvation is concerned, there are only two religions the world has ever known or

¹ Max Lucado, *In the Grip of Grace* (Dallas, TX: Word Publishing, 1996) 12.

² *Ibid.* 32.

will ever know – the religion of divine accomplishment which is Biblical Christianity, and the religion of human achievement which includes all other kinds of religion by whatever names they may go under.”³ This is an important and very useful distinction when one is attempting to show the beautiful nature of God’s grace. The uniqueness of the grace system is one of, in not the most, convincing aspects which Christians should be able to utilize in evangelistic efforts. One of Lucado’s clear gifts is the ability to use everyday happenings and such in order to illustrate a given point. The humorous description of his ability, or lack thereof, to maintain a clean house provided a great example of one of the primary reasons why we should seek to live a certain way once we have come into contact with God’s grace. The statement he made where he more or less learned to maintain a different norm concerning personal cleanliness proved to be a poignant moment for me as I read. He explained that as a result of being in close proximity to someone who “held a higher standard” that this resulted in his improvement in this area of his life. He goes on to explain that since Christ moved in to our lives that our houses should come into order as a result of a higher standard now being present. We want to do good out of thankfulness for the grace that has been freely given to each who wishes to accept it.

Concepts Which Will Prove Useful in my Ministry – *In the Grip of Grace*

One of the most damaging tragedies that take place in the Church is the fostering and practice of the consumer mentality. Too many times a concept rings a special place in a person’s heart and mind and there that concept will remain most times never again to see light of day. The concept or ideal is internalized and kept for oneself; consumed, once for all. That being said, I am thankful that the question of seeking concepts and ideals to put to practical use was at the forefront of my mind as I read this material. A former professor of mine, Mr. Charles Lee of Louisville Bible College, related on more than one occasion, that you really don’t know

³ Ibid 71.

something unless you are able to effectively communicate it to someone else. Within the chapters of this book, lie some truly valuable tools which should be helpful to me in my ministry. One of the first ideas which I came across was the aforementioned concept of “the mystery and majesty” detailed in the previous section. This concept should prove to be a useful tool in an apologetic discussion. The cricket analogy which this chapter centered on does a fine job of illustrating how foolish some of the conclusions which man have devised to explain many of life’s difficult questions. Some of the other concepts which really made an impact upon me would be extremely helpful in a counseling situation. If someone were dealing with a self worth issue, the chapter on godless living would be a great starting point. In the last part of the chapter Lucado relates the nature of our purpose here on earth which is in stark contrast to the pervasive humanist worldview; “With God in our world, you aren’t an accident or an incident; you are a gift to the world, a divine work of art, signed by God.”⁴ He goes on to relate that he was given a gift, a football. This football was just any other football but something made it special and unique. It was autographed by a number of famous quarterbacks. The obvious implication is that we have unending value as individuals because we have the autograph of God as His creation. Another very useful counseling tool would be the concept where Lucado asks the difficult question, “Is God still a good God when he says no?”⁵ Much like C.S. Lewis in his exposition on the problem of pain, Lucado explains why certain things exist in the life of someone who is saved by grace. He is essentially saying that grace is enough. God has solved the one problem which no man has been able to solve or ever will be able to solve, and that is the problem of death. His grace to us has solved that problem providing each with the opportunity to be freed from the bondage of sin and death. All the other problems which we may incur are

⁴ Ibid 30.

⁵ Ibid 132.

really in the big picture of things made to be irrelevant by the surpassing greatness and majesty which is found only in the grace of God through the blood of Jesus Christ. Another helpful counseling tool would be the chapter on the Heaviness of Hatred. This chapter provides the bitter and angry person with the ideals necessary to dealing with these damaging attitudes. The statement made which related that “the longer you walk in the garden, the more likely you are to smell the flowers” rings true. Here, Lucado is making the point that an improper understanding of grace and forgiveness leads to a person who will struggle with anger, hatred, and bitterness. When we realize the plight of our own situation in relation to the perfect God, we come to realize we are in no way deserving of such favor and merit which is found in grace. If we realize our standing and how truly awesome the impact of grace is on each of our lives, then the logical turnaround is to extend the same to others around us. Understanding this dynamic allows a person to forgive and extend grace in the same manner as it was extended by our Lord and Savior.

Disappointments with the Text – *In the Grip of Grace*

I do not count myself as a great theologian. I am certainly not a well known author who has many good ideas. Certainly, I recognize that I have much to learn and I am excited to do so. That being said, I do however, feel that Lucado has some ideas which at best are well intentioned, but are less than Biblical in my estimation. One of the first ideas which headed in the right direction at first but veered down a road which is unfortunately the wrong way was his explanation of God’s gracious anger. Here it seems that Lucado is relating that God’s righteous anger is born out of His love for His children. He explains that God is angered with the fact that his children have chosen a path of destruction. I would go further to say that as a result of God’s holiness that He cannot look upon us as children and that is what He hates. His disdain is not

born out of love; it is born out of His holiness. The statement at the end of the chapter, “How could a loving God feel anything less,” illustrates that His righteous anger stems from love. Grace comes from His love. Wrath is born of His holiness. This is the clear distinction which is lacking here in this chapter. Another unfortunate theme which popped up in numerous chapters was de-emphasis of the meaning of baptism. On numerous occasions Lucado eludes to the symbolic nature of baptism. Again he falls short of the complete meaning. Yes there are aspects of baptism which are highly symbolic. But baptism is much more than just a symbol. It is the point where we come into contact with the blood of Christ. The point in fact where grace is made manifest in our lives is when we rise to walk in newness of life having now been forgiven and blessed with the gift of the Holy Spirit. Another unfortunate minimization was that of the account of Abraham. Lucado related that righteousness was accounted to Abraham when He believed. Belief was the point which made Abraham right with God. What I believe Lucado to be missing here is the necessary obedience which was inherently tied to his belief which was reckoned to him as righteousness. If Abraham did not obey God’s voice and go, then belief could not have been enough. The book of James relates that even the demons believe. Is this reckoned as righteousness? Without the necessary act of obedience belief would not be reckoned as righteousness. Another regrettable thing which he relates in this book is the idea that we are not supposed to judge one another. Yes the Bible does teach that we are not to make heaven/hell determinations for a given individual. However, it seems that Lucado would limit any judgments of man one to another. A question which arises out of this then is how the elders of a congregation would make a determination on someone “living in some sort of sin.” Wouldn’t the elders be standing in some sort of judgment if they were to discipline someone living this sort

of lifestyle? Our politically correct society had unfortunately forced its will into this area rather than the Bible speaking clearly on this subject; political correctness run amuck.

Questions that Remain – *In the Grip of Grace*

Again, I would reiterate that I certainly in no way claim to have arrived intellectually, but I can't say that I have many questions which remain or for that matter did I have many questions entering the reading. That being said, two primary questions remain. The first question is found very early in the text and the next near the end. In the early moments of the book, Lucado is explaining that all men are held responsible for what has been made known to them. The question which comes to my mind born out of that statement is this; for someone who has never been exposed to the Gospel can they be held accountable to it; And could a person respond properly to general revelation and how so? My next question would be directed more to Lucado individually. What is his position on "once saved always saved?" Can a person reject Christ and lose their salvation?

Conclusion – *In the Grip of Grace*

Tonight, when all the day's activities are done and filed away, I will lay my head on the pillow. There may have been a time in my life where this could be a time of angst and anxious wonder robbing precious minutes and hours of needed rest plagued by questions of worthiness and scales in need of balance. But, as a result of understanding God's immense and wonderful grace to even me, I can fall asleep resting on His promises. Having read this book and studying this subject this semester, I can say that this understanding has been enhanced and certainly has lead to a peace in my heart and mind that surpasses all of man's understanding. There are few

things in this life, if any, which could top that. All praise and glory to our Lord Jesus Christ in whom we may rest.