

Autumn 2016

BRITANNIA UNITED CHURCH

THE  **Britannian**

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Sabbatitorial

Having just returned from summer holidays and from reading Reverend Jim's message about his sabbatical, I looked up the word in Wikipedia:

Sabbatical or a sabbatical (from Latin: sabbaticus, from Greek: sabbatikos (σαββατικός), from Hebrew: shabbat (שַׁבָּת) (i.e., Sabbath), literally a "ceasing") is a rest from work, or a break...

In biblical times, farmers let the land lie fallow one "sabbatical" year in seven. Universities and the church have a formal sabbatical policy. Even some employers allow people to put aside part of their salary and take a year off with pay. Sabbaticals are a chance to work on a pet project, to do something that normal duties don't leave room for. It isn't a holiday: in fact some people work harder on their sabbatical than they do in their regular jobs.

After the sabbatical, land, the professor, the clergyman, or the employee is renewed and refreshed. I know that I am after a couple of weeks off.

There's lots to do in the church this year. I hope you had a good sabbatical summer.

Peter Bain
Editor

A Message from Dori Jensen

It is hard to believe that fall is here. The summer has flown by and soon we will be planning for Advent and Christmas.

I would like to thank the Ministry and Personnel Committee for hiring me this past summer in my capacity as a Licensed Lay Preacher and Pastoral Care Councillor while Rev. Jim has been away on his well deserved Sabbatical as well as his holidays.

I have throughly enjoyed this past summer and the time spent visiting with 68 church families, so far, with a few more visits still yet to happen. I have also enjoyed the challenge of preparing and delivering 10 of the summer services. I would also like to express my appreciation to the church choir, Myles Frosst, Rev. Debbie Roi and Debb Suddard for covering the other four Sunday services. I would also like to thank Candice Armstrong, the church secretary, for setting up all of my visits for me.

If I had to apply a theme for this past summer, I would call it “Draw the Circle Wide”, which is a beautiful new hymn from the “More Voices United” Church Hymn Book. The chorus of this song is “*Draw the circle wide. Draw it wider still. Let this be our song, no one stands alone, standing side by side, draw the circle wide*”. I have always believed, in my 17 years here at Britannia United church, that our church is a welcoming church and I am proud to be a member of it. This past summer it was a great pleasure to draw my personal circle wider as I visited many of our church families and consequently had time to get to know you better. We, as a church, widened our circle as we added several new families over the summer as well as welcomed many visitors. Our circle at Britannia has God as our focal point and we are always ready to open our circle and make it bigger as we welcome all people into our church.

As school has started and families have finished vacations, I am looking forward to drawing the circle wider still as many families return to church after being away for various summer activities. We also take great pleasure in welcoming newcomers to our church and, as we start our after church service coffee fellowship time again, we have further opportunity to widen the circle as we meet and greet each other.

This past summer, during my visiting, I have heard several suggestions to help widen our church circle even wider, such as holding bible studies and having more “fun raising” activities and, as promised, I will bring these ideas forward to our church council.

Thank you to our church family for welcoming me to the church pulpit this summer and into your homes and for the gracious hospitality and warm welcome.

Looking forward to welcoming Rev. Jim back to the pulpit on Sunday, September 25th.

May God bless each and everyone one of you, now and always,

Dori



“Disappointments are inevitable: discouragement is a choice”.

Charles Stanley from *30 life Principles: a study in growing in knowledge and understanding of God.*

Minister's Message

I'm writing this message on my last night in Malaysia. It has been an interesting adventure that ends with a two-day journey home. What began as a sabbatical 14 weeks ago ended with two weeks of holidays and an opportunity to visit our beloved Shannon who has been teaching English in a small town, not far from here, since the beginning of May.

This has been my third sabbatical since I started my ministry with Britannia United Church sixteen years ago, and each one has been very different. The first sabbatical took me to Scotland and the Isle of Iona, one of the great spiritual centers in the world. As I planned my second sabbatical, I was caring for my mother who was in the final stages of her battle with cancer. Not knowing how long she would be with us, I chose to stay at home and focus on my photography as an expression of my spirituality and an inspiration for writing. This time, I had several ideas for my sabbatical time, none of which seemed to be working out.

I wanted to focus on and deepen my practice of yoga, but after trying out three different studios, couldn't find a good fit. I searched for a kayak so that I could spend time on the water and perhaps go into the wilderness to do some camping and secluded meditation, but every kayak I found was sold before I could get it, or just didn't work out. I did find one! But it took some time. I did spend time in nature, working in the garden and took day trips that helped me to relax, have some fun and free my mind. But I really didn't have a lot of motivation for anything really focused. It took some time, but I figured out what the problem was. I was grieving.

This has been a tough year. I'm sure you will all agree that the toughest part was the emotional strain of losing several of our most devoted members. Valcina, Earl, Emma, and Dave each helped to define Britannia United Church in their own way, and each touched my heart in ways that will define my ministry for years to come. Losing them took a piece of my heart that will never be replaced. I remember our minister at City View saying that doing funerals doesn't get any easier with time, in fact, it gets harder because you start to bury friends. We all lost three very good friends this year, and I know personally that I needed time to grieve.

This sabbatical gave me that time. It gave me time to reflect, renew and recharge my batteries. And that is what a sabbatical is for. It shares the same root as the Sabbath – the day of rest ordained by God, so that we may rest from our work, give thanks and praise.

Now I didn't just rest. I had some great experiences and profound conversations that have already started to shape the direction the coming year will take. I will fill you in on that in time. For now, I just want to say thank you.

“Thank you” to you, my church family, who made this sabbatical possible and held me in your thoughts and prayers. “Thank you” to Dori for maintaining the flow of Sunday worship and pastoral care. “Thank you” to everyone who continued to support the work of our church while I was away. And “thank you” to everyone who has let me know they are anticipating my return. The sabbatical did what it was supposed to do, and I'm ready. By the time you read this, I'll already be back in the saddle, and ready for the next adventure.

With much love. Rev. Jim

It's Bazaar time again!

Britannia's Harvest Moon Bazaar & Tea will be on Saturday, October 22 from 9:00 am to 2:00 pm. The popular hot turkey sandwiches and apple crisp topped with ice cream are on the menu again.

As usual the success of our church events depend on the help and support of the city's best volunteers! Sign-up sheets will be posted on the bulletin board soon so please signup. We are looking for helpers in the kitchen, the tea room, garage sale area, baked goods table, silent auction, and the Christmas room.

We are looking for Christmas decorations, books, DVDs, children's toys, jewelry (please see Dee and Maggie), silent auction items, small furniture, electronics and garage sale items.

Bakers: warm up your ovens and pull out your favourite recipes, our baked goods table is waiting for your goodies! Let's make this year's bazaar the best yet. Thanks in advance for all your help -

Kelvin Stanke

P.S. No items dropped off until October 16th!

Mission, Service and Outreach Report – September 2016

It has been a relatively quiet summer for the Mission, Service and Outreach committee, as our "Minute for Mission" readers were given the summer off for travels and vacations. Minute for Mission readings have started up again, just this month. The sign-up sheet and the readings are both on the bulletin board in the front hall. Come join us!

Wendy and Verne attended an event at the Pinecrest Terrace Community House in June. It was a beautiful day, perfect for a barbecue, with tons of food and many residents and their families getting together simply to eat and to chat with their neighbours.

The event included giving bicycles, helmets and bike safety lessons to many of the children. Britannia United contributed to the event and our assistance was very much appreciated.

Britannia Woods Food Pantry thanks people who have made donations of food stuffs during the summer. There was a heavy run on the Food Pantry at the end of August as families faced "Back to School" expenses. Thank you to people who have continued to save egg cartons (45 per week are used) and milk bags. These are very useful for subdividing 50 lb. bags of onions, potatoes, beets, carrots and other produce that comes from the Ottawa Food Bank as part of the project to supply more fresh fruits and vegetables. Please know that your contributions are appreciated, and keep up the good work!

The current members of the Mission, Service and Outreach committee are Wendy Gallant, Susan Aiken, Marilyn Bruce and Verne Bruce. New members are always appreciated!

Choir

Do you enjoy singing? **Come and join the choir!** We meet at 7:30pm on Thursdays (and 9:45am on Sundays too). You need not be a professional, but enjoy the choir experience. If you can't make it out on the Thursday but will be there on the Sunday – speak to **Mary Lou Hulan**: she can help!

Pastoral Visits

Dori is still looking to do visits with you!! **Have you changed your mind and would like a visit? Or did we not contact you yet?** Please call the office and we can make all the arrangements there!

Open Church Positions

Here is your chance to help the church in a practical way. We have several open positions where you or someone you know can use their talents.

- Treasurer (if you know someone or would be interested, please speak to Barry Meredith)
- Stewards Committee Chair (please speak to anyone on Stewards)
- Teachers for Sunday School (please speak to Mary Lou Farrell)
- Security Chair
- Rentals Chair
- West-End Villa Members
- Secretary for the AGM (March only)

What is . . .

Senior's Tea?

On Thursday's from 1pm to 3pm, get together to enjoy tea time and games (bridge, euchre, scrabble, etc). Those who are 50+ (and seniors-at-heart) are invited to join! Speak to **Maggie Taylor** for more information.



Never compare your beginning to someone else's middle



Electoral Reform Consultation

Join us to discuss improving our federal electoral system. Should the number of parliamentary seats match each party's share of the popular vote? Feedback from the meeting will be sent to the Special Parliamentary Committee on Electoral Reform, which wants to hear **your** views. Tues. Sept 27, 2016, 7 – 9 pm. First Unitarian Congregation of Ottawa, 30 Cleary Ave, Ottawa. For more information: Sharon Reeves at sharon.reeves@bell.net. Bus #2; free parking.

Thanksgiving

A blind boy sat on the steps of a building with a hat by his feet. He held up a sign which said: "I am blind, please help."

There were only a few coins in the hat.

A man was walking by. He took a few coins from his pocket and dropped them into the hat. He then took the sign, turned it around, and wrote some words. He put the sign back so that everyone who walked by would see the new words.

Soon the hat began to fill up. A lot more people were giving money to the blind boy. That afternoon the man who had changed the sign came to see how things were.

The boy recognized his footsteps and asked, "Were you the one who changed my sign this morning? What did you write?"

The man said, "I only wrote the truth. I said what you said but in a different way." I wrote: "Today is a beautiful day but I cannot see it."

Both signs told people that the boy was blind. But the first sign simply said the boy was blind. The second sign told people that they were so lucky that they were not blind. Should we be surprised that the second sign was more effective?

Be thankful for what you have. Be creative. Be innovative. Think differently and positively. When life gives you a 100 reasons to cry, show life that you have 1000 reasons to smile. Face your past without regret. Handle your present with confidence. Prepare for the future without fear. Keep the faith and drop the fear.

The most beautiful thing is to see a person smiling. And even more beautiful, is knowing that you are the reason behind it!

Sunday School Teachers

Would you like to help mould the younger minds of our church?

We are seeking teachers for our Sunday School! The more people we can get, the better – it allows us to do rotations and to get a chance to attend the service occasionally. Please speak to Mary Lou Farrell for more information.

MacMillan's Fundraiser

Next Sunday the order forms will be out! Please take a form and try to get as many orders as you can. More orders = more income! The forms are not due back to the office until October 26th! Pick up of the ordered items will be either November 14 or 15th. Any questions, please ask Candice in the office.



I hope you are enjoying the Newsletter! Please help our members and take a copy to those who can't make it here.

Sunday School Programming for 2016-2017

A message from the Chair of Christian Development Committee

Due to the ongoing shortage of regular volunteers to support the Sunday School program, this year's program will be set up differently. The activity centre that is currently in the Sanctuary up in front of the Pulpit will remain. Beginning October 2nd, the activity kits provided will contain material and activity sheets that are relevant to Reverend Jim's message for that week.

This material is part of the 2016-2017 Sunday School curriculum. It is our hope that the adults will support the program through discussion and participation in the activities with their children following the Service. If a volunteer is available on any given Sunday, an announcement will be made at the beginning of the Service that the children should go to the Little Chapel following the Theme Presentation. The children can bring their activity kits to work on and there will be a movie available for the children to watch.

For any questions or if you can volunteer, please contact Mary Lou Farrell at 613-424-3362 or by email: sundayschool@brituc.ca

What is . . .

Craft Group?

On Mondays from 1:15pm to about 3pm, a bunch of members get together and create their wares – socks, hats, sweaters, etc. (any craft is welcome). This gives time to make your items and have some interesting and engaging conversation too. Please speak to **Edith Kenney** if you need more information.

Upcoming Events

Harvest Moon Bazaar & Tea
October 22,
9am – 2pm

Upcoming Meetings

Worship and Music Committee
September 28th at 9:30am

Council Meeting. September
29th at 7:30pm



“God’s ‘no’ is not a rejection. It’s a redirection.

Britannia United Church - Treasurer

Our current Treasurer has resigned for personal reasons. We are looking for someone to fill this position as soon as possible.

I have included the Treasurer's responsibilities and Duties for your information and consideration.

Treasurer Responsibilities:

The Treasurer is responsible for the church's financial policies, procedures and controls, and their implementation. He/she monitors, oversees, receives and disburses monies on behalf of the church body.

Treasurer Duties:

- Prepare the annual budget, by sending out call letters to the Committee Chairs reporting to Council, tabulate the budget spread sheets, calculate the amount of funds required to operate the church for the upcoming year and develop an integrated budget
- Present the draft budget for the recommendation by the Committee of Stewards and the Church Council to the congregation at the Annual General Meeting for approval
- Collaborate with the bookkeeper for the drafting of financial reports
- Brief the Committee of Stewards and Council on the church's financial situation by presenting its financial statement at regularly scheduled meetings
- Prepare cheques for quarterly payments (e.g. Mission and Service (M&S) Fund, Presbytery Assessment, Minister's Travel Allowance, Minister's Telephone Allowance)
- Write and sign cheques in collaboration with church secretary and other members with signing authority
- Prepare the monthly cheque for the remuneration of the music director
- File necessary documentation with the head office of the United Church of Canada, Presbytery Office and government agencies
- Maintain up-to-date records of financial transactions, by tracking revenue and expenditures
- Checks the balance in the bank account to ensure there are sufficient funds to conduct church operations
- Liaise with the Committee of Trustees should funds be in short supply
- Prepare an annual financial report, in collaboration with the bookkeeper
- Ensure that the financial statements are audited
- Present audited financial report to the Committee of Stewards and Church Council, and to the congregation at the Annual General meeting for approval
- Keep the congregation informed about the finances of the church through newsletters, bulletins and meetings

If you are interested in the above position, please let the office or Stewards know. Thank you for your consideration for this very important position with the church.

Verne Bruce, Steward

A Short History of the Sabbatical Year in Late Antiquity

From <http://rabbimichaelsamuel.com/2010/03/a-short-history-of-the-sabbatical-year-in-late-antiquity/> “Unorthodox Jewish reflections on the issues of our day”

Sometimes even the most obvious biblical passages can be perplexing. One interesting verse is a case in point:

“Therefore, do not say, ‘What shall we eat in the seventh year, if we do not then sow or reap our crop?’ I will bestow such blessings on you in the sixth year that there will then be crop enough for three years. When you sow in the eighth year, you will continue to eat from the old crop; and even into the ninth year, when the crop comes in, you will still have the old to eat from” (Lev. 25:20-22).

It is difficult to determine how seriously the ancient Jews observed the שמיטה “Sabbatical Year” (literally “release”). The fact that people attempted to keep it at all, given the hard economic realities, is remarkable. The inhabitants of Jerusalem in the 5th century B.C.E. swore to let the ground remain fallow during the seventh year (Neh. 10:31). During the Maccabean revolution, the Syrian army led by general Lysias, took over the fortress of Beth-zur because food was in short supply during the sabbatical year when the attack was made. Its people “evacuated the city, because they had no provisions there to withstand a siege, since it was a sabbatical year for the land” (1 Maccabees 6:49, cf. vv. 53-54).

Josephus records that both Alexander the Great and Julius Caesar remitted Israel’s taxes during the Sabbatical years.[1] Tacitus also attests to the Jewish observance of the Sabbatical year but attributed the custom to “indolence.”

Given the animosity between Judea and Rome, the Romans demanded that the Jewish remnant of Judea continue paying the crop tax. No exceptions were made whatsoever for the struggling Jewish population of the land.

In the aftermath of the failed Bar Kochba revolution, the rabbis modified the law regarding the Sabbatical year during the Roman period to allow for food to be grown in order so that the people should survive, and be able to pay its taxes to a hostile Roman government.

What makes this an intriguing passage is the fact that the Sabbatical year continued to be observed even in a post-exilic era and most Halachic authorities ruled that the Sabbatical year was still a rabbinic obligation. The only reason the Sages exempted the farmers was because the imminent danger they faced should they have disobeyed. Other authorities insisted that it was biblically required, while others still maintained it was a nothing more than a pious custom.

Already, by the during the early part of a 3rd century, Palestinian sage Rabbi Yannai, announced what must have been a longstanding practice that the community had observed since the destruction of the Temple in Jerusalem, “Go out and sow in the seventh year, because of the arnona,” (crop tax) to aid the farmers in paying the heavy tax of the seventh year (T.B. Sanh. 26a).



“Thank you, God for this good life, and forgive us if we do not love it enough”

Garrison Keillor.

How Amazing is Your Grace?

Sermon June 5, 2016

How amazing is your grace? That's a fair question. As Christians, we speak about grace, we sing about grace, we pray that we may both give and receive grace, and we claim to model our lives after Christ – who is not only defined by grace, but who we believe to be the physical manifestation of the God of grace.

And – one of the top ten songs of all time, and of all forms of music is the hymn “Amazing Grace” - so it only seems fair to ask “how amazing is your grace?”

Okay, I had an experience recently that inspired me to think about that question. It had to do with the words of Christ, our interpretation of scripture and the limits of God's grace.

I was at a funeral where I was introduced to a woman who was disillusioned with religion and the church. Reading between the lines, she had been raised in fundamentalism, and she had trained as a nurse. Something I said in the sermon had resonated with her, for the first time in a very long time – it may have been the part where I said that I had a lot of problems with religion – after the service she really wanted to speak to me and to share her thoughts.

She said, “The epiphany moment for me came when I was asked to baptize a newborn child who had died. I held the child in my hands and used the traditional language that I had been raised with ‘I am the way, the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father but by me.’ The very next day, I held a Muslim baby in my hands and I realized the impact of those words.”

It was a watershed moment for her. As long as she could remember, she had interpreted those words – the words that Christ had spoken – to mean that if you wanted to get to heaven you had to be a Christian. She didn't give it a thought, until she held that Muslim baby in her arms.

We had a pretty great conversation about faith and belief and the movement of the living, Holy Spirit in the interpretation of scripture. Then I went to the chapel to collect my things.

Another woman had followed me there. She too wanted to talk to me about my sermon. She began with a compliment, and then she said how important it is for people to hear the message of Jesus Christ, and then she lowered her voice and said “knowingly” to me “because not everyone is going to get into heaven” followed by “because Jesus said ‘no one comes to the Father except by me’.”

I knew what she meant. She wasn't just talking about Muslims and Jews and Buddhists, and Agnostics and Atheists. She wasn't just talking about people who had committed horrific crimes, or who had led corrupt and unjust lives. She was talking about the people who had been sitting in the chapel that day – people who may very well have defined themselves as Christian, but weren't actively involved in their faith community and more specifically – had not accepted Jesus as their Saviour and Lord through a baptism of the Holy Spirit.

What she meant, was that I hadn't gone far enough in my sermon, and I had missed the opportunity to tell the people in that chapel that if they didn't accept Jesus as their personal Saviour they would not get into heaven.

The first time I heard that message I was 16. I saw a girl I knew from school, waiting for a bus and stopped to say hello. During the course of our conversation she told me that she had become a Christian. When I told her that I had started going to church again, she asked me if I was born again. Then she proceeded to tell me that going to church wasn't enough. If I wasn't born again, I wasn't going to get into heaven, and she proceeded to quote me that scripture.

Now I'll ask you that question again. How amazing is your grace? Or perhaps I should ask, what are its limitations?

In an interview about his book "What's So Amazing About Grace?" Philip Yancey was asked the question "How good are Christians at conveying this message of grace?" To which he replied:

When I ask people, "What is a Christian?" they don't usually respond with words like love, compassion, grace; usually they describe a person who's anti-something. Jesus was not primarily known for what he was against. He was known for serving people who had needs, feeding people who were hungry, and giving water to the thirsty. If we the church were known primarily for that, then we could cut through so many divisions.

Wasn't that Jesus' point in the story of the Good Samaritan? Someone asked Jesus what he must do to have eternal life and Jesus responded with a story in which he deliberately chose an offensive character—a Samaritan heretic of mixed race—as the hero. God cares about how we live, how you act out your faith, who you care for. The religious people walked right past the broken, bruised person. Even though they may have had all the right doctrine, they did not have the action.

I'm sure that most of us have heard the story of the Good Samaritan. I know I have preached on it many times. In the context of a conversation about the interpretation of scripture and how to get to heaven, Jesus told the story of the Good Samaritan.

Samaritans were people of mixed blood – they were not of pure Jewish descent and even though they worshipped the same God the Jews worshipped and shared the first five books of the Jewish scriptures, they were considered unclean because they had both Jewish and pagan ancestry.

In fact, the Samaritans were so despised by the Jews and considered to be so unclean, that they would not pass through Samaritan territory in case they might become contaminated. Jews travelling from Judea to Galilee would cross over the river Jordan, bypass Samaria by going through Transjordan, and cross back over the river again, once they were close to their destination.

And yet, the role model in Jesus' story was a Samaritan. The Samaritan was the one who stopped and helped a sick and dying man while the religious leaders of the community walked by on the other side. The Samaritan was the true neighbour. The Samaritan was the one who demonstrated God's love in action. And in doing so, the Samaritan was the one who led the way to eternal life.

The interesting thing, is that the story ends with the Samaritan leaving the man in the care of an inn-keeper promising to return and cover all of the costs. It does not end with a conversion, a baptism, or any acknowledgement on the Samaritan's part of Jesus as his personal Lord and Saviour. The Samaritan left the story and he entered it – as a Samaritan – and his actions are an example of how we may inherit eternal life. Would you exclude him from God's grace? Christ himself did not.

In fact that are several stories about the grace of God being extended to those who were outside of the newly forming Christian community. Last week we read the story of the Centurion who asked that his servant be healed. Jesus didn't put any conditions on the Centurion – he acknowledged his faith, and healed his servant.

Yancey said that people often get annoyed with him. In fact, he says that grace itself is annoying. Asked why people get angry at him over his books he said "It's easy to show grace to people who think like you do, much harder to show grace to those who offend you or with whom you disagree." He said "I work hard to ground any controversial material in the Bible. I tell people that I'm not radical – Jesus is, the Gospel is."

He went on to say that:

..Jesus' approach toward a decadent Roman empire, as well as toward individual sinners who must have offended him deeply, seemed almost the opposite of the self-righteous attitude of many (evangelical Christians). As I studied Jesus' life, the notion of grace kept hitting me in the face. All his stories made the wrong person the hero: the prodigal son not the responsible older brother, Lazarus not the rich man, the good Samaritan not the Jewish rabbi. And I began to see grace as one of the great, often untapped, powers of the universe that God has asked us to set loose. Human society runs by Ungrace, ranking people, holding them accountable, insisting on reciprocity and fairness. Grace is, by definition, unfair. That intrigued me.

Later in the interview, Yancey is asked how the church needs to change so that it might better reflect the grace that Christ lived. He said:

As I study the Pharisees, and Jesus' strong words against them in Luke 11 and Matthew 23, they seem to have one basic problem: they hang around other Pharisees all day. Hence they start competing with each other, focusing on trivialities, missing the broad sweep of God's love. Probably the best defense for the church is to follow the Great Commission. I've found that evangelical Christians who have a homosexual sibling or first cousin look at the issue differently than those who don't know any gay people. I've found that people who actually work in a drug rehab center or homeless shelter see those people differently than people who hear politicians talk about them. We need to go out into the world and get our hands dirty, and if we do so, we'll see a world thirsty for grace.

As the interview comes to a close Yancey is asked why so many people who claim to be Christian and believe in grace, seem to be so burdened, tense, worried and stressed, to which he replies:

Many Christians understand grace only on the theological, abstract level but have not let it penetrate the soul. Frankly, I first truly understood grace while reading the great novel by

Victor Hugo, Les Miserables. When the kindly bishop not only refused to punish Jean Valjean for his theft, but instead lavished gifts on him—in that scene I sensed the stirrings of God’s grace to me, who deserved just the opposite. There’s a good reason why that musical captured the attention of the world. It’s because we hunger for grace. As you say, believers don’t convey a relaxed, buoyant feeling. We need to let it soak in that there is nothing we can do to make God love us more...and nothing we can do to make God love us less. God is love—a noun, not a verb—and cannot help loving. We should walk around humming that tune Amazing Grace all day long.

He goes on to say:

If we could grasp the revolutionary aspect of grace, it would help Christians’ reputation so much. That God loves good people is nothing new—every religion says that. That God loves sinners, that’s grace. While we were sinners, Christ died for us, said Paul, who called himself the chief of sinners. With his background, Paul understood grace.

When you read the Bible, you soon discover that God does not limit grace:

You’ll read about the great characters of the Old Testament such as Moses, whose foul temper led to murder and rebellion against God, and David, who committed adultery and murder. Then turn to the New Testament where you’ll see the church led by Peter, a former traitor, and Paul, a former “human rights abuser” of Christians. I’d have to say, No. We can never sink so far that God’s grace will not reach us. At the same time, grace does not leave us there. It raises us to new heights.

In closing, Yancey states that:

Unless we face into our own failings and weakness and desperation, we may never receive that gift of grace.

Grace implies a risk, the risk that we might abuse it. Yet as I read the Bible, God seems quite willing to take that risk. Remember that Jesus made the “failures” the heroes of his stories. The question isn’t whether God will forgive us in the future, it’s whether we will repent and ask for forgiveness. God’s grace is there for us to receive, if only we hold out open hands.

I love The Pilgrim’s Progress because it gives such a realistic picture of the Christian life. Virtually every time the pilgrim faces a choice, he makes the wrong one! He chooses bad companions and makes bad detours all along the road. The message of grace is that we fall down, and God picks us up and dusts us off. Again, and again...

Now that is amazing. Amen



After the game, the King and the pawn go into the same box.