

When Grace Is Offensive

In episode 5 of my new series, *Questions With God*, I ask the question, “Where do we draw the line between justice and grace?” I used to view grace as a kind of rose petal—something delicate and beautiful, tender and elegant. It was something I would see when I walked into a Christian bookstore and was surrounded by Precious Moments figurines and faith-fueled posters of nature scenes.

And then I met a child molester. And my view of grace changed dramatically.

While filming my second movie, *Furious Love*, in Thailand, I struck up a conversation with an American man on the streets there, mostly because he was an American and I knew he’d be able to speak English. We were filming in the red-light district of Bangkok, as the whole point of that movie was to put God’s love to the test and see what it looked like up against extreme darkness. We sat on a bench and I asked him what he was doing here, and what he thought of this place. As casual as can be, the man told me that he came here a few times a year because it was one of the few places he could go to have sex with young boys and not get in trouble. I was horrified. But more than that, as a father of 3, I was angry. This place I was filming was bad enough, but now the facade and curtain of distance had come down, and I was staring into the face of someone who was both despicable and criminal.

Then I remembered the movie I was making.

Suddenly, grace was no ceramic figurine with bright, beautiful eyes. It was offensive. How could God be offering this guy grace and forgiveness? How could He even love this man even as he irrevocably harmed children?

We love the idea of grace on the backside of its application. We love when the drug addict stands in front of the church

telling the congregation how God set him free and cleaned him up. We love the prodigal who returns to the fold, but often only after he returns. Grace becomes much more problematic and messy before it has been accepted, because we also have a natural bent towards justice. We want our criminals to be punished. We want the people who hurt us to pay for what they've done. But grace is scandalous, because it circumvents punishment and offers love. Obviously, criminal activity often demands justice, but grace is love offered even in the midst of justice—it goes after the core of a human being, whereas justice deals with the actions of a person.

I often hear people praying for God to give them the eyes of Jesus, but to truly see as He sees, we need to begin to view the world around us through the eyes of grace and mercy. This is no easy task, especially when dealing with people who are still living in sin and rebellion. But grace is our call. Grace is our charge. Grace is, after all, what was given to us.