

IS SHOWING GRACE NATURAL FOR US?

My daughter's basketball team that I coach played four games this past weekend. We played two games on Saturday and had two more games to play late Sunday afternoon. I was tired heading into the last two games of the weekend after having led worship on Sunday morning. Besides being tired I was also very frustrated before our fourth and final game of the weekend. In the third game we had the lead for most of the game despite the referee calling 33 fouls against us. My team is not a rough or dirty team by any means, but it seemed this referee was calling everything as an infraction against us. All these fouls allowed the other team to catch up and force overtime. In overtime, my four best players had fouled out of the game leaving me with just five players. We lost the game due to all these fouls against us.

I admit I was frustrated with the poor officiating but was more upset because of the impact it had on my players. Some of my players were in tears afterward, and others were upset thinking they had lost the game for us with all of their fouls. We had only 90 minutes to cool down and regroup before our next game. Little did I know at that time my ability to show grace would come into light at this moment when I was already tired and frustrated. A few minutes before we were to go onto the court the other coach came over to me and shared how one of his players had forgotten her jersey and would have to play wearing a white t-shirt instead. The only way she could play was if I as the opposing coach was okay with it. Naturally I was. I did not want her to miss out on playing the game. I even shared with the other coach that I would go over to the referees and let them know I was okay with it. As we walked on the court, my assistant said to me, "I am surprised you showed such grace. Most opposing coaches would not have let her play if she did not have on a proper uniform." It never even crossed my mind for a second to disqualify her from playing. It just came out so natural for me to extend grace in this situation even though I was tired and still frustrated from what happened an hour earlier. Imagine if I had not shown grace in that situation. Imagine how disappointed this teenager would have been not to be able to play. Imagine how upset her teammates, her coach and even her parents would have been if I had not allowed her to play. Imagine the negative witness I may have

displayed to my assistant coach or my own players or parents if I had not shown grace. Extending grace in that situation came so natural to me even though I was exhausted and frustrated from the previous game. I am so thankful and glad it was my natural response.

I have thought a lot about this incident over the last 24 hours. The question that I keep pondering is whether showing grace comes naturally to us, or is our ability to offer it affected by various circumstances and situations we find ourselves in. Grace is a quality that is so natural for God to express. Paul understood this and wrote about it in Ephesians 1:6-8:

So we praise God for the glorious grace He has poured out on us who belong to His dear Son. He is so rich in kindness and grace that He purchased our freedom with the blood of His Son and forgave our sins. He has showered His kindness on us, along with all wisdom and understanding.

In the Bible God's kindness is also referred to as His grace. As we journey through Lent towards Easter we are reminded of God's grace and kindness in how He forgave our sins and purchased our freedom from death through Jesus' death on the cross. I love the descriptive language Paul used here to describe God's kindness and grace as if it is pouring down upon us like water does as we stand under a shower. As recipients of God's grace should it not be natural for us to offer it to others when they make mistakes in life? That is the question that was really at the heart of what the assistant coach was commenting about to me after this incident. A mistake was made by either the player or her parents that she did not bring the proper uniform to play. Some coaches in that situation would not have shown any grace. Being tired and frustrated from the previous game I could have easily failed to show grace in this moment. Thankfully, grace was a natural response I had when tested in this moment. I would have felt bad if I had slipped up and not shown grace. I do not share this story to boast or brag in any way. I am sharing it as a teaching moment that might help all of us to consider these questions:

- **Is showing grace our natural response when others have made mistakes?**

- **Is it natural for us to continue to show grace even when we are tired or frustrated at something that has just happened?**

We may not be able to fully answer these questions until we are confronted with a situation like I was in before the game on Sunday night. If we already know the answer and have determined offering grace is not a natural response on our part than perhaps Paul's image of grace may be a way to help us achieve this. If showing grace is not a consistent response for us, then perhaps we need to spend more time standing under the shower of God's grace. As we do, hopefully we will be reminded of all of the times God has extended His grace upon us when we have made mistakes. The more we remind and refresh our memories with God's grace hopefully it will come naturally to us to offer the same kindness to others as He has done for us. By offering grace naturally in these moments we will experience what I did after showing it. I went over to the referees as I had promised to tell them I had no problem with the girl playing in a white shirt. The referee smiled at me and said, "I watched the end of your last game. The referees should never have called all the fouls they did. I am sorry that had to happen to your team." He did not need to say that, but I am glad he did. His words lifted our spirits helping us to play confidently in the next game. Grace was offered by me, and grace was returned back. It truly is a beautiful thing to be part of when grace becomes natural.

Keep safe and God Bless - Pastor Dean.