

I went through a divorce. It was the saddest, most difficult time in my life.

I had behaved in some ways that were hurtful to my marriage, and could not seem to get it all straightened out. And I guess you would have to know my first wife to know how the dynamics of our relationship were destroyed. She said, "In my mind we were divorced when \_\_\_\_ was born. We will never be close again."

I was broke, in debt, alone, and depressed. One day I sat out by the ditch in the country. There was a storm rolling in from the west—a massive wall of clouds that seemed to stretch from the ground to infinity, and from south to north. I said to myself: "That's my life. It's at an end. I will never see another happy day." I felt that there was no escape, no where to turn.

I entertained the idea of suicide, but realized that that was not my answer. I loved my children dearly, and could never leave them in that way. But I was quite sure that God did not love me. How could he when I had failed in the most important duty of my life?

Soon after, in a Sunday School class, our teacher read from Shakespeare about "grace being twice blessed."

"The quality of mercy is not strained; It droppeth as the gentle rain from heaven Upon the place beneath. It is twice blessed—it blesseth him that gives, and him that takes." (Merchant of Venice)

I didn't even hear the obvious thought from the play. What I heard was God's encouragement to me in my situation. I wept like a baby—so much that I had to excuse myself from the class. I began to ask myself, "Is it possible that God would still love me, even after all I had done or failed to do?" At the time, I did not believe it was possible. But the thought grew in my heart like a seed planted in the soil.

The next weekend, I went with a friend to a Danny Gaither concert. Danny sang the song, "We Have This Moment Today." I was a basket case. I was weeping so hard I think I was shaking the whole row of seats, even though they were anchored in concrete.

I had always been a happy person. People called me the smiling preacher. I was successful, positive, and popular. All that only added to my misery when it was all gone.

Little by little, day by day, the hope grew in my heart and mind. Years later, at an Emmaus weekend, I would understand more about the persistence of God's grace. God was calling, offering, inviting me to come to him again.

Previously, I had known about grace. I preached it. I thought it was for drug addicts and alcoholics and others who had made a wreck of their lives. Now I found myself in their shoes, feeling helpless and hopeless. But I finally began to understand the true beauty of grace. It truly is AMAZING grace! Grace is God's love for me even when I DON'T deserve it. I am just as needy, just as sinful, just as helpless as any derelict. And my only hope of peace is God's love and grace.

Then I met Marian. She was God's answer for me. And talk about happiness! God did restore the joy and happiness, the zest for life and love! All praise to my wonderful Lord Jesus Christ who lived and died to set me free from bondage and fear and pain!

And if he did it for me, he did it for you.

In the Love of Christ,

Clarence (Clare) DeBoef

Retired pastor in the United Methodist Church