GRACIOUS LIVING

The LORD bless you and keep you; the LORD make his face shine upon you and be gracious to you; the LORD turn his face toward you and give you peace. (Numbers 6:24-26 NIV)

What has gracious living got to do with recovery? For years we lived in a dysfunctional lifestyle, which eventually became our normal way of life. Now we are learning to live in a way that is rewarding for us and in a way which creates a healthy environment for those around us. ***Since you have heard about Jesus and have learned the truth that comes from him, throw off your old sinful nature and your former way of life, which is corrupted by lust and deception. Instead, let the Spirit renew your thoughts and attitudes. Put on your new nature, created to be like God—truly righteous and holy.*** (Ephesians 4:21-24 NLT)

Prior to coming into recovery we seldom thought of God let alone desired to love Him. We were primarily concerned with ourselves and how we might use whoever, or have whatever, would fulfill our need in a given moment. We gave little or no thought to the consequences of our actions upon ourselves or the impact they might have on another person.

When "our" way of life did not work we came to realize that we were powerless over our addictions and dependencies and sought to find a way that would help us live in harmony with God, ourselves, and others. In the recovery process we learned about the grace of God poured out on this world and how He, through His son Jesus, paid the price for our sins, freeing us, and establishing us blameless in His sight. Daily He is working to change us into the likeness of His Son. ***And God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus, in order that in the coming ages he might show the incomparable riches of his grace, expressed in his kindness to us in Christ Jesus. For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God— not by works, so that no one can boast.*** (Ephesians 2:6-9 NIV)

Jesus countered the ways of this world with the ways of the Kingdom of Heaven and gave us principles on how to live graciously. He told the story of a son who squandered his inheritance and was destitute when he decided to go home to his Father, whom he knew was kind, and ask if he would hire him as a servant. Upon arrival his Father lovingly welcomed him back, not as a hired servant, but as a son of the household. Another story Jesus told was of a Samaritan who helped a Jewish person who had been robbed, beaten and left half dead. The Samaritan bandaged the Jewish person's wounds and put him on his donkey and brought him to an inn where he took care of him. The next day when the Samaritan had to leave he gave the innkeeper money to take care of the victim and was prepared, upon his return, to pay any extra costs that might be incurred in looking after the victim.

Now, in the first story, taking the son back would have been kind but then extravagant grace was poured out on him by His Father, a robe was draped around his shoulders, sandals were put on his feet, a ring was put on his finger, and the fatted calf was killed for a feast to celebrate his return. The son was restored by the Father's unconditional love to his former position within the household.

In the second story, just bandaging the victim's wounds and sending him on his way would have been kind but taking him to the inn and personally covering the cost of the victim's recovery was extravagant grace being poured out by one person on another. This story would have been shocking to a Jewish audience because Jews had no dealings with Samaritans and the two persons involved were considered by society to be enemies.

The Father in the first story represents our Heavenly Father and his unconditional love and extravagant grace poured out on each of us. The Samaritan represents all of us and how we should live graciously with one another, bearing each other's burdens, regardless of our differences. When asked who was the victim's neighbour in this story the crowd replied that it was the one who showed mercy on him. The crowd was then told by Jesus to go and do likewise. When Jesus was asked which commandment was the most important of the commandments of Moses he answered, ***"Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: 'Love your neighbor as yourself. All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments."*** (Matthew 22:37-40 NLT)

What does gracious living in recovery look like for me? Have I allowed the generosity of God's care for me to flow over into my relationship with others? As God has been kind and forgiving with me, have I, in turn, been that way with others? As God has chosen to forget all the wrongs I've done, am I now choosing to do the same with my family and friends? As God makes Himself available to bless me today with grace and tenderness, am I doing the same for everyone I meet? How has my attitude, my reactions, and my behaviour towards others changed because of my receiving God's unconditional love?

QUESTIONS

1. What difference has the unconditional love of God made in my life?
2. How has my behaviour towards others changed because of my receiving God's unconditional love?