

## Diana's Grace Story

Recently, our pastor challenged each of us to share our "grace story." He suggested we tell our story with a YouTube video, or a blog post, or a Facebook post, or in some other very public way.

Well, why not? I have this blog for the sake of teaching people to machine knit, and daily, at least 600 people click on it. I correspond with many readers and have met some of you in person at classes, and I've come to think of you as friends, so let me share something that is deeply important to me.

I did not attend church as a kid. My father, in particular, was very disillusioned about Christianity. My folks had been raised in old-fashioned families and had flown that coop (literally – Daddy was a pilot) and were seeing the world and being sophisticated, drinking, smoking, having fun and not interested in a church-going lifestyle.

I always believed in God. I loved to look at beautiful things, and I saw a lot of things I believed God made. My mother kept gorgeous gardens filled with flowers, and we used to travel (and move a lot), and I loved the ocean, the mountains, blue sky and green trees, and even the faces of people. We had Bibles around the house, thanks to my maternal grandparents, and I was very curious about the Bible. My favorite was all drawings and yet contained all the major stories of the Bible, given in adult language. I was always reading whatever I could find.

I was never a person who thought I could be really good and get to heaven. I read about the Ten Commandments; I understood that I was prone to selfishness, dishonesty, and anger, and couldn't figure out how people could follow those rules. Maybe other people could, but not me.

When I was 15 years old, we moved again, and I found myself in a new high school in a civilian community in Southern California. I was shy and awkward and looking to make a few friends, because that's what you need to do quickly after a move. A very nice girl, Dorothy Rawson, invited me to attend her church's youth group. I started going. I liked the kids and the pastors, and we had fun, and most of all, I was fascinated by the teaching.

It was an ordinary Baptist church with very typical Christian teaching, but I was astonished at the information. I had figured that churchy people must put a lot of energy into being nice all the time (because they all seemed nice all the time to me, even though I didn't fit in), and knew I couldn't quite manage that; however, I came to understand that God is holy and people are flawed, and yet God has solved that problem. "While we were yet sinners, Christ died for us." God had reached down and across the gap between himself and us. They were explaining to me that knowing God wasn't impossible for me, that I didn't have to be "good enough," but that God had done all the work.

Jesus loved ordinary people, and I was told how much He loved me. I didn't buy into Christianity right away. I attended several months and listened to what they were teaching and dug around in my mom's old Bible to make sure it was all really in there and see if I thought it meant what the teachers said it meant. I figured out quickly that this is a religion with high standards, so I'd have to live a certain way. I knew I'd be in hot water at home, too, if I actually became a believer.

God loves and accepts us, if we'll just accept and follow him. That's grace – getting more than you could ever deserve. How could anyone turn that deal down?

After a while, I just had to make that commitment to follow Christ. I wanted to be forgiven and pointed at Heaven. I confessed and promised obedience, and experienced an unexpected, overwhelming change in my life.

I was a depressed teen. My family was a mess just then, and with my introverted, sensitive temperament, I had slowly slipped into a state of simply enduring life until I could leave home. My parents loved me, but were going through a tough time, and I didn't feel their love. When I became a Christ-follower, God snuffed out that depression as quickly as you can blow out a match. Within hours of praying for God's forgiveness and presence in my life and promising to follow Christ, I was zapped with the most incredible, deliriously happy sense of being loved. I could not get over how marvelous that felt. I was just singing around the house (and I can't carry a tune, so that must have been hard to tolerate), smiling at school all day, and completely thrilled with each new thing I learned about God, who had a plan to make something beautiful out of my life.

I was baptized at that church, and my parents refused to attend. I was different, and there was no going back. I started praying for my family.

As a young adult, I went through a few years of doubting, but after a while, I realized that there wasn't any better way to live or truer words than the teachings of Christ. Now after well over 40 years of belief, I see how God has been faithful in my life. I have seen most of my siblings become Christians. My parents have passed away, and both of whom made peace with God first. I didn't do anything to make all that good happen, unless you count praying, but it did happen. God took care of it. It completely changed our family.

All these years, God has been present and working. Sometimes it's dazzling, like the time I begged God for a perfect EKG for my toddler, who had a heart problem, and on the next checkup, the doctor couldn't find anything wrong and discharged him from care, remarking in astonishment to the young doctor he was training, "This is a perfect EKG!" and showing her the old EKGs that showed heart damage in his chart.

But the vast majority of the time, God provides in quiet, subtle ways. He's not like those guys who twirl signs on street corners. He reveals himself to those who seek him.

God made dreams come true for me. I wanted a college degree, a difficult thing in my situation, and it not only happened for me, toward the end, I had an employer who paid for books and tuition and a husband who helped with everything while I attended in the evenings. The Lord gave me the most amazing marriage and later on, two wonderful sons. I have the most wonderful, kind, generous, fun husband. It's grace again, better than I deserve.

I wanted to be a CPA, since I worked as an accountant, and I accomplished that in my early 40s and can't even begin to describe the terrific experiences I have had in this profession. A few years ago, I wanted

to find a way to teach beginning machine knitters, and y'all know how that worked out – by using the internet, I can teach people in Death Valley or Argentina. How cool is that!

I've had some heartaches and crises, too, and God was right there with me. It was heartbreaking to see my brilliant father lose his intellect before he died, and after that, when mom had to be on oxygen the last five years of her life, struggling with lung disease. I had a frightening, serious illness in my late 40s and God saw me through that (but no more taking health for granted). I also struggled with losing my vision around that same time, and after two cataract surgeries in middle-age, I see pretty well.

I used to think that Jesus would solve all my problems – unfortunately, that idea was implied in some of the early teaching I absorbed - but it doesn't work that way. He is present and loving, always, but life has all kinds of surprises and difficulties. Times come when you have to lose something or even someone you treasure, but you can never lose God, who faithfully loves and who works everything out in a larger plan.

God worked it out that we were able to raise our two sons in a loving, believing home, even though we both grew up in very unhappy homes. He worked it out so I could enjoy my parents in their later years, and he taught me to forgive people, to accept people, and to live in peace with people. Well, still working on that, but I've come a long way and I know God hasn't given up on the project! He has a better way and is eager for me to learn it.

As I worked on this, I couldn't figure out how to conclude it. You see, I don't have an ending for my grace story. I'm only part of the way along my adventure. I know that God is going to do more wonderful things, and I get to hang out and watch him make beautiful things out of my life.