

DO YOU SEE WHAT I SEE CHRISTMAS: ANDY STANLEY

So we are in part three of this series, The Unsettling Solution for Just About Everything. I'd like to begin with something that purposely will make all of us uncomfortable, and I've done my best to put together a list of things that will make all of us uncomfortable. So if at the end of my list, if you're not uncomfortable, I wanna apologize ahead of time, and if after I read my list, you just wanna shout out your adjective because I missed you, you feel free to do that, although it may ruin Christmas for you and draw undue attention to yourself. Even if you're watching from home or in the car, feel free to shout out your word if I missed you.

What do you call a group of lying, cheating, greedy, covetous, lustful, porn-watching, tax-dodging, racist, jealous, judgmental, lonely, angry people who eat too much, who spend too much, who drink too much, who medicate too much, who worry too much, smoke too much, but who gather together because they believe Jesus is the light of the world and they need more light? You call that the church. Did I miss anybody? Yeah, you should clap, yeah. In fact, if you showed up today and you thought you were surrounded by a bunch of holy people, we just burst your bubble, didn't we, big time. In fact, if you showed up today or you're watching today and you say, oh, I don't think I really fit with the church, perhaps you found yourself on my list.

It's very odd to me to hear people talk about the church like the church is an institution rather than a group of people, that the church, you know, the people, sometimes maybe you've said this, well, the church ought to do this, the church ought to do that, the church should do this, the church should do that. My favorite one is when people say, Andy, the church should take a stand, the church should take a stand. I have a friend named Jonathan Redford who, I first heard him say this, so I stole this from Jonathan. He said, Andy, generally, generally speaking, when people tell you to take a stand, they really want you to take their stand, right. So now when people say, I think, Andy, I think the church should take a stand, I always say, any stand, or your stand? Then they realize, oh no, I want the church to take, if you're not gonna take my stand, don't stand anywhere.

Isn't that right, isn't that right? But really, they want me, as the pastor, to take a stand. But here's the deal, and you know know this, and if you don't know this, it's time for your to know this. I'm not the church, right. We are the church. Besides that, the church isn't a place where everybody just all agrees on everything. The church is a gathering of diverse people. The church is a gathering of very imperfect people. That's why you weren't offended with my list. You could find yourself on the list, right. The church is a gathering of imperfect people with different views and experiences, who really, they don't agree on everything.

We basically just agree on two things. We just agree on two things. We agree that God sent his son into the world to forgive us of our sins and to help us get beyond ourselves, to forgive our sins and then to help us get over ourselves. Secondly, we believe, the thing that we agree on is that God sent his son into the world and when he did that, he extended something to us that now we are responsible for extending to one another and others outside the gathering. That things that we've been called to extend to others we've been talking about in this series, is simply grace. Grace when it comes to relationships and grace when it comes to us is like the oil in the machine. You know how machines work, or you know enough about how machines work to know why oil is important.

If you think about your car engine, the different parts on the engine of your car were designed specifically to work together, but they are so specifically designed to work together that without oil, they build up friction and they destroy each other. Grace is like the oil in a relationship, and grace is like the oil in a local church, and grace is like the oil in society. Grace enables folks who are different from each other to work together without destroying each other. Grace allows people who aren't like each other to like each other. Grace allows

people who aren't alike to get along in such a way that they're able to accomplish amazing things, even though they have differences.

The cool thing is, the amazing thing is the reason we talk about this at Christmas is that your Heavenly Father, God, initiated this. Your Heavenly Father modeled this. In fact, it's in one of the most famous lines of one of our most famous Christmas carols: God and sinner reconciled, God and sinner reconciled. At Christmas, we celebrate the reconciliation of God and sinner, and that could not happen without grace. You can be right without grace, but you can't be reconciled without grace. Aren't you glad, because I am, just speaking for me. Aren't you glad Jesus did not come into the world to be right? Jesus came into the world to make things right.

In fact, within the context of relationships, grace becomes amazing when it's extended to other people. I mean, as I said last week, grace is invisible, grace isn't even a thing until it's experienced, and it's only experienced within the context of relationships. When God sent his son into the world, he's extended grace to us by sending Jesus to us. Grace is most amazing when it shows up in relationships because it can only be experienced in relationships. You, this is amazing, you are most amazing when you extend grace to other people. You are most like your Father in heaven when you extend grace to most, to other people. In this way, God's amazing grace, his grace to us, God's amazing grace to you is an invitation to be amazing.

There's a sense in which grace, or the opportunity to extend grace to other people is my greatest opportunity relationally, and it is your greatest opportunity relationally. It is your opportunity to be amazing. But, and here's the rub, extending grace to other people is not easy for some of us, is it. More specifically, extending grace to certain people is not easy for some of us. If I can just pry a little bit, extending grace to certain kinds of people, certain groups of people, certain people who embrace certain behaviors or certain groups of people that remind you of someone who hurt you in the past.

All of us have a person or group of people to whom it is very difficult, or challenging, to extend grace. Jesus, this is so amazing. Jesus tells us why. Jesus, in the one of the most, perhaps, perhaps what is, perhaps what is the most unsettling question asked by anyone at any time, anywhere, Jesus explains why it is unsettling or why it is so difficult for me to extend grace, and perhaps why it's so difficult for you to extend grace. But I gotta warn you about this question. This question is a difficult question. This question is like being punched in the nose. I just wanna give, say one other, give one other qualifier.

If you're not a Christian, and by that I mean, you're not someone who is following Jesus, you don't have to play. You can kind of sit back and watch all of us feel miserable when Jesus asks us this question, because we're Jesus followers, and if you've not chosen to follow Jesus, this may be a good reason to never follow Jesus because this question is so difficult. It really is like a sucker punch. It's like he just gets right up in our face. So, here's the good news. If you're not a Christian, you can choose whether or not you wanna follow and pay attention or, you know, answer this question. If you are a Christian, like me, we have no choice.

So, here's the question. Here's a question that takes us right to the epicenter of why it is so difficult for most of us to extend grace to somebody or to a group of people. So, are you ready for this question? If you're watching at home or you're driving, are you ready for this question? Because this, this is gonna rock you back on your heels. Jesus was the master communicator, and apparently he knew how to land a punch. Here it is. "Why do you look at the speck of sawdust in your brother's eye and pay no attention to the plank in your own eye"? Oh man, can you just talk about prayer or our Father in heaven? Yeah, no, no, no, we'll get to that. "Why", this is Jesus, and this is important to remember because for the next few minutes, you're gonna get very upset at me.

I just want you to know, I didn't say this. I wouldn't ask you this question. This is Jesus, I'm just the mouthpiece. You know, don't shoot the piano player, okay. This is Jesus asking you and asking me. "Why do you look at the speck of sawdust in your brother's eye and pay no attention to the plank in your own eye"? Why do you focus, why do you, you know, look specifically, why do you give all this attention and get so amped up and ramped up and emotional about the speck, the little itty bitty thing that they do wrong in your brother's eye and you don't pay any attention to your issues, to your problems, to your habits, to your attitudes, to the plank in your own eye? To which somebody says, well preacher, I'll tell you why. Because it's not a speck of sawdust, okay. She's a Democrat. He's a Republican. That's not a speck of sawdust, that's a forest, okay.

So don't get all upset with me and my response to him or her. Hey look, he's a white politician, okay. That's not a speck. I went by their home, they were watching CNN, okay. So that is an issue for me, all right. He has Fox News on all the time, 24/7, right. But for some of us, it's more personal than that. For you, your response is, it's not a speck. My dad left when we were eight years old, he never looked back, and my mom had to raise three kids with none of his help. Then, when he got old and sick, he shows up and he wants us to help out. I'm sorry, that is not a speck of sawdust. That's not a speck. I don't know what those are, but those aren't specks. Rightfully so, we should get a little defensive around a question Jesus would ask us when he doesn't even seem to know our story, right? Secondly, Jesus, you might be tempted to say, I don't have a plank in my eye.

First of all, that's not a speck of sawdust, and secondly, the reason that I look at the speck of sawdust in my brother's eye and don't pay attention to the plank in my own eye is I don't have a plank in my eye. I see the world as it really is. I understand how things really work. I know what's going on. I mean, come on, let's be honest. You don't, you don't have a, you don't have a log, or as, you know, I grew up hearing it being taught, right, you don't have a plank in your eye, do you? I mean, come on, you're not in any way influenced by your upbringing, right? Or the environment you grew up in or are in now, right?

I mean, these things couldn't possibly taint the way you see the world or the people around you, could you? This is ridiculous. You're not influenced by your experience, your education, your health, your lack of health, your health struggles, the fact that you've been blessed with great health. You have, you're not influenced in any way in terms of how you see the world and people around you based on your success, your failure, your insecurities, your opportunities, your IQ or your EQ, right? I mean, some of you don't know what EQ is because of your IQ, but these things, these things don't influence the way you see the world, right. I mean, Jesus isn't talking to you. You don't have a plank in your eye. Other people have planks in their eyes that Jesus has confused for sawdust, right. But you don't have a plank, I don't have a plank. We're fine, right? Jesus isn't even talking to you, he's not even addressing you, is he?

Perhaps, but Jesus isn't through. He goes on. He says, "How, how can you say to your brother, how can you say to your brother-in-law, how can you say to your sister, your sister-in-law, your neighbor, that guy at work, the woman at work, your boss, the person that used to be your friend that ran off and took stuff or took her or took him, they're not your friend. How can you say to that person, 'Let me take the speck out of your eye. Let me help you see clearly, let me help you see the way the world really is. Let me tell you how the world really works. Let me tell you what you ought to do, let me tell you what you should have done, let me tell you what you should have done so you wouldn't be where you are today. Let me help you see the world the way it really is, because I see the world the way it really is.'"

"When all the time," Jesus says, he's just amazing, isn't he? "When the whole time that you've been critical, the whole time you've had such a bad attitude, the whole time you look at your watch, every time you visit, 'cause you told your wife in the car, your husband in the car, 'We're staying 30

minutes, 30 minutes, 30 minutes, ready, go, we got 30 minutes, okay." "Why, why, why, why," he would say, "when the whole time, you've had a plank in your own eye". Then, if you're not a Christian, you're gonna love this part. In fact, this may be the favorite, your favorite thing Jesus ever said, you may not even know he said this. He wasn't talking to you, by the way, he was talking to us, if you're not a Christian. But if you are a Christian, he's talking to us.

Jesus rears back, and maybe with a smile on his face, I don't know, Jesus rears back and he gives us a two word sentence. He says, "You hypocrite". To which all of the unchurched people are like, finally, somebody is givin' it to those church people. Who was that again? Jesus said that, yay, he called his own folks hypocrites. You sinner, you fall shorter, right, it's what it means. You did it on purposer, over and over. Do you know why God is able to extend grace to you in spite of you? Do you know why God is willing to give you what you don't deserve, even though he knows better than anybody what you do deserve? Do you know why God doesn't overlook sin, that God chooses to forgive your sin and treat you as if you'd never sinned? Do you know why God is able to extend grace? Do you know why God decided to send his son into world? To pay for your sins so that you could be reconciled through grace, because he could see you for exactly who you are and take all of that into consideration.

He knows, he knew all about your upbringing. He knows about your dad and your stepdad. He knows about the environment you were forced into or the environment you were taken out of, or the environment that you can't get out of now or the environment that you're in now, at school or your fraternity or your sorority or the people you're surrounded with. Or you showed up in the big city and it's so different than the small town you grew up in, and you have to have friends. Nobody can survive without friends. He sees all that, he gets all that. He knows what you've experienced, what you've done and what was done to you. He understands your health challenges and why that and how that set you back. It was more difficult for you to connect, it was more difficult for you to excel, it was more difficult for you to connect. He understands what success has done to you. It blindsided you.

Most people have a difficult time passing the success test. He understands what failure did to you. He understands the connection between what you were told as a child and your failure as an adult. He knows your insecurities. He knows the opportunities you missed the ones you took advantage of, the ones you should not have taken advantages, advantage of, and where it led. He knows all about your IQ and your EQ. He took all of that into consideration. Having taken all that into consideration, and what you did with it and what you didn't do with it, and your Heavenly Father decided to extend grace to you. He took it all into, he could have taken it all into consideration, he took it all into consideration.

The Apostle Paul, looking back on the crucifixion and the resurrection of Jesus, the Apostle Paul, who understood himself to be the biggest hypocrite of all even though he knew the law as well as anyone else in the first century, wrote this. But he didn't have us in mind. He had himself and his first century brothers and sisters in mind. He wrote this incredible, incredible statement. But God, and this meant so much to the Apostle Paul. But God put on a demonstration. God didn't just say it, God didn't just send it in a letter. God put on a demonstration of love. But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

Now, the verb tense here is really important, and this is, I still can't get my mind around this. The Apostle Paul recognized when he was writing this letter, this is what he recognized, while I was north of Jerusalem, unaware of what was happening in Jerusalem, while I was north of Jerusalem, sinning, Jesus, at the very moment I was a sinner sinning, was dying for the sin that I was sinning. Think about this. This wasn't future tense. This was the Apostle Paul realizing, because they lived at the same time, while I was still a sinner, actively sinning, Jesus was nailed to a cross for the sins I was committing at that very moment. He understood grace in a way that I'm not sure we can ever

understand it, because he lived in the day and age.

Imagine that, while I was still sinning, Christ died for the sinner. I think if he had written, made the same statement with you in mind and with me in mind and with us in mind and with the future in mind, I think he might have written it this way. But God demonstrates his own love for you, or us, in this: knowing ahead of time, knowing ahead of time the sins we would commit and confess and repeat and confess again. Christ died for us anyway. Because that's what grace does. God was able to take your whole story into account, and he gave you what you deserved least, but what you needed most. Then he says to you, and he says to me, come on, I just want you to do for others what I have done for you.

But to be clear, here's what Jesus is saying. He's saying, now look, don't leave here and feel, just feel bad about yourself and tell your boyfriend or your girlfriend or your roommate or your fraternity brothers or your sorority sisters, or you know, well, you know what, I'm gonna try to be a better person, and I'm gonna try to be nicer. You know, my stepfather's coming over for Christmas, and I'm not gonna cross my arms the whole time he is there. I'm gonna keep my, you know, I'm gonna, I'm not gonna be rude to him. I'm gonna try to get up to zero. This is not about go home and be a nicer person and go home and try to be a better person. Jesus says, no, this isn't what that's about. That's not where this starts. This doesn't start with recommitting yourself to being sweeter and kinder. He says first, he gives us a list, first, before you try to figure out how to extend grace to someone else, you will never get that right unless first, you take the plank out of your own eye, and then, and only then, will you see clearly enough to know how to extend grace to the people that need what they don't deserve, but what you've been called to extend to them.

This is so powerful. Just honestly with me, see, I prepared this message about three weeks ago, and it has been on my nerves for three weeks, and I couldn't wait to share the guilt, because this is such a difficult question. Because I can't get up here and talk about this without saying, God, okay, if we could just get past the Sunday when I present this, then I can quit thinking about this. But I, what are the planks I'm carrying around? Because there are people I have a hard time with. What is it about them that actually reflects on something about me? Because planks get in the way of grace.

So here's my version of Jesus' question. His is better, mine is shorter. You got planks? You got planks? You got planks? I don't know if you have planks. Jesus says, you probably got planks. That's why there's something you're not looking forward to. Look, don't miss this. Because Jesus, I think he is saying, look, when you begin to see that person the way I see that person, you will not dread the encounter as much as you will see the encounter as an opportunity to do something unsettling. You won't dread that occasion, that dinner, that party, that meeting, that gift exchange. You won't dread it as much as you'll see, aha, here is an opportunity to do something amazing.

Here's something, an opportunity to do something unsettling. Here is the one opportunity I may have all year to do for someone what they would not do for me because of what they did to me that they're not expecting for me to do for them. Here's the brilliance of Jesus' teaching. This is why he says, first, first, first, first, you've got to examine your own heart. You've got to examine what's in your own eyes. First you've gotta remove the plank before you try to extend grace. If you try to just be nicer and more patient and more kind but you don't deal with your own planks, this isn't gonna work. First, remove the plank from your own eye, and then did you notice that the terminology, and then you will see clearly, then you will know, then you will know better, then you'll have greater insight to, then you'll have, you'll be able to have, be a little bit more authentic when you decided to do for someone else what God through Christ has done for you.

Here's what I've learned, and honestly I've learned this the hard way, I'm still learning this. The more aware I am of what God has yet to do in me, in other words, the more time I spend

in the mirror of God's Word, the more time I spend reading the messages and the teaching and the activities of Jesus, the more I am aware of what God has yet to do in me. The more time I spend on my planks, the less aware, the less aware I am of what he has yet to do in you. The more aware I am of what he is yet to do in me, the less aware. In fact, not only just the less aware, to be honest, the less bothered, the less put off, the less offended. The more aware you are of what God has yet to do in you, the more aware you become of what God has yet to do in you, the more aware you become of the planks that you need to remove, the easier it will be to extend grace to others, because the less aware you will become of what God has yet to do in them because you have focused your attention.

This is what Jesus taught on what God has yet to do in you. This is so amazing to me, this is why I love the Christmas story. At Christmas, at Christmas, grace came to earth. At Christmas, grace came to earth to dwell with us in spite of us. This Christmas, you are gonna have an opportunity, perhaps, to do some in spite of, and it won't be effective, and it won't work, and you will find no joy in it, unless you first remove the plank from your own eye. Isn't this interesting, that God was more, and this is the goal, this is where you have to get, this is where I have to get, this is why this is such an important lesson right before Christmas.

Isn't it interesting that God was more brokenhearted over our sin than he was put off by it? Isn't it interesting that God was more brokenhearted over our sin than he was offended by it? That God was so brokenhearted over our sin, he sent his son into the world to pay for our sins so that God and sinner could be reconciled. Jesus drew near, even though we by choice, had been far away. Jesus didn't take sides, Jesus came alongside. Isn't that amazing? That's what we find throughout the gospels. But, there was an exception. There was a group of people that Jesus did not come alongside of. In fact, the kind of running gun battle in the gospels, the group of people that Jesus had the most conflict with, they weren't sinners in the traditional sense of sinners, you know this if you grew up in church. The people that Jesus had the most problem with were people who represented graceless religion.

Religious people whose planks made it impossible for them to see people the way he saw them. People who had so dumbed down God's law that they didn't believe they were in the need of grace. People that had so twisted and manipulated the law of God, they didn't feel like they needed the grace of God. Jesus had no patience with that group of people. I don't wanna be one of those people, and you don't wanna be one of those people. If you're not a person who's a church person or someone who follows Jesus, it may be because you've run into too many religious people who embraced a graceless religion. Because the truth is, when grace is up front, when grace is up front, when grace is out front, there's something very, very attractive about grace, and the people who exhibit grace.

In fact, your favorite people in the world, I don't even know you or your story. I don't know you or your story, but some of your favorite people, in fact, maybe your favorite person is a person that wears their grace and carries their grace out front. John said that Jesus, as we saw in the first week, that Jesus was full of grace and truth.

So I'm gonna ask you one more question even though this is another pesky question. But I feel like I need to ask you. Jesus was full of grace and truth, what are you full of? Or let me elaborate a little bit, what, what comes out of you what comes out of you when you get shaken up? When you get shaken up, what comes out? When you bump into sinners like you, when you bump into the sinners like you, the only difference being they have a different list of sins, when you bump into people who kind of get on your nerves, but actually you get on their nerves as well because you're different, but you get on each other's nerves, what comes out of you when you get shaken up? When you get shaken up, what comes out? Then here's the bigger question for all of us to wrestle with together. Not just what are you full of,

not just what am I full of, but what are we full of, as a congregation and as a group of congregations? What is our church full of?

When people think about the name of our church and they run into you, and they find out, where do you go to church, what comes to their mind? Because as I said earlier, people, and the church specifically, the church is most appealing, the church is most appealing when grace is most apparent. One of the reasons that you'll invite people to church this next weekend or during the Christmas season and they won't want to come, the reason they will push back has nothing to do with what they read in the gospels about Jesus, I guarantee you. It has far more to do with other Christians they've met and churches, church experiences they don't want to repeat. But here's what we've learned, and here's what we've learned together, and here's what we aspire to. The church is always more appealing when grace is most apparent. We are the church, every single day, every single place that we go.

So, what about you? Are you ready to remove a plank? Are you willing to remove a plank? Are you willing to remove a plank so that you can see clearly in order to benefit and give grace to people around you? People that you're sure are wearing the plank, people that you're sure have the plank and you're the one with the sawdust, would you be willing to consider that perhaps you have a plank that needs to be removed, that is keeping you from extending grace to someone in your life that honestly, this is no exaggeration, grace from you could change their life. Grace from you would be an introduction to the grace of God. Grace from you, because they know they don't deserve it because they are so aware of what they've done. It could change their life.

For some of you, that is your story. It was the grace that you received from someone who you hurt deeply that ultimately opened you up to the truth of Jesus, and perhaps it's why you're back in church, or perhaps it's why you're listening today. Now, I know you got your house ready for Christmas, right, you've got your yard ready, you've got the lights up. In fact, some of the lights and stuff you've put in your yard causes me to have to extend grace to you if I'm honest, because you have too much stuff in your yard, you really do. You overdid it. I think, honestly, it just makes me jealous 'cause we don't have a lot of stuff in our yard 'cause every year I get lazier and lazier and you know, anyway. So, forget that.

So the point is, your house is ready for Christmas, your yard is ready for Christmas. The question that I wanna ask all of us is are you ready for grace to come to town? Are you ready for grace to come into your home? Are you ready for grace to envelope and embrace the people that you're gonna see and be around? Are you ready for Christmas? Taking, taking that plank out of your eye, recognizing what's gonna be difficult for your to recognize, acknowledging the thing that none of us wanna acknowledge about ourself is the best preparation for a season characterized by grace. Here's the thing. If you still feel superior to sinners like you, you still have some work to do. You've lived long enough to know this. When there is a person that really just gets on your last nerve, oftentimes, there is something in them that is reflecting back on something in you, and we all know that.

I think Jesus would say, hey, as you celebrate my birthday, as you celebrate my birth, as you celebrate what God did on your behalf during this Christmas season, take some time to reflect and remove the plank from your eye. Grace really is, relationally speaking, it really is the unsettling solution for just about everything. Jesus was full of grace. He extended it to people who were nothing like him, and then he asked people like us, who are nothing like him, to extend it to people who are nothing like us, and who may not even like us. So let's do that. This Christmas season, let's do something unsettling. Let's be unsettling. Let's give to someone what they don't expect, and what they perhaps don't necessarily deserve. When you do this, you will be like your Father in heaven. You will be part of the unsettling solution. You will be amazing, amazing, just like, just like grace.

