



The Smiling Maven

Grace for Grace (John 1:16)

חסד על חסד (יוחנן א'טו)

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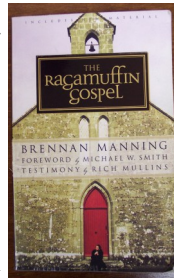
Book Review: *The Ragamuffin Gospel* Surprise, Surprise, it is about Relentless, Magnificent Grace

Why do we have so much trouble accepting the awesome wonder of God's grace? Why are his children not walking in the freedom of grace? Often, it is because we have not discovered, received, or embraced the absolute phenomenon of the grace that has been poured out through Calvary. There are so many books that encourage the believer to pull themselves up by their own strength, to be more determined, more dedicated to prayer, more involved in Christian service. *The Ragamuffin Gospel* by Brennan Manning is a book for those people tired of the impossible climb of self-made, self-determined, super-hero Christianity. In a nutshell, the book is a warm and open look at the wonder of grace.

Wise King Solomon said, "There is nothing new under the sun". Manning's book does not express new theology, new

end times prophesy, no new methodology for Christian living, but it is an incredibly powerful book. Manning helps the believer to rediscover the wonder of grace in the midst of life in the 20-21 century. Grace has not changed. It was the discovery of grace that transformed the apostles; it was grace that transformed Martin Luther; and it is still grace today that truly transforms lives. Though Manning's own words and description are helpful, he also quotes from others who have gone before us, and had also discovered the wonder of grace. Manning quotes from Paul Tillich's work, *The Shaking of the Foundations*:

"Grace strikes us when we are in great pain and restlessness. It strikes us when we



walk through the dark valley of a meaningless and empty life....It strikes us when, year after year, the longed-for perfection does not appear, when the old compulsions reign within us as they have for decades, when despair destroys all joy and courage. Sometimes at that moment a wave of light breaks into our darkness, and it is as though a voice were saying, 'You are accepted. You are accepted, accepted by that which is greater than you, and the name of which you do not know. Do not ask for the name now; perhaps you will find it later. Do not try to do anything now; perhaps later you will do much. Do not seek for anything, do not perform anything, do not intend anything. Simply accept the fact that you are accepted.' If that happens to us, we experience grace".¹

Life as a believer in Jesus does not always go the way we would like, the way we expect, the way others expect. It is in these times that we are often pressed to find the reality of God's grace. It is during

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Books, Books, Books

During the days when I was in a dark valley, there were a number of books that ministered to me. There was a common denominator among them. Each of them had enough of an atmosphere of grace to capture something in my heart. When we are struggling, when we are hurting, our capacity to "pull ourselves up by the bootstraps" disappears. The reality of the gospel is that our bootstraps are never sufficient. Yet, it may be that in these hard places, we can finally discover that simple truth: it is not our own ability, our own goodness, or our own spirituality, that saves us. It is the awesome, relentless love of God, graciously and freely poured out, that captures our heart, saves our soul, and keeps us going in the midst of whatever life brings.

During that time in my life, there were six special books that touched by heart in

this important way. The books are:

The Ragamuffin Gospel by Brennan Manning, Multnomah Publishers, Inc. 2000.

Deadline by Randy Alcorn, Eternal Perspective Ministries 1994

The Final Quest by Rick Joyner, Whitaker House 1996

A Grief Observed by C.S. Lewis, Harper Collins Publishers, 1961 restored 1996.

Wild at Heart by John Eldridge, Thomas Nelson Inc. 2001.

Mere Christianity by C.S. Lewis, Harper Collins Publishers, 1952, renewed 1980.

In future issues of The Smiling Maven, a review of each of these books is planned. This issue begins with the review of *The Ragamuffin Gospel*.

The Smiling Maven

The Smiling Maven is a bi-monthly Jewish flavored newsletter sharing God's incredible grace through the rocky and difficult times of my life. There is a desire to communicate God's incredible grace with Jews and Gentiles. There is coming a spiritual atomic bomb of that incredible grace. It is an imminent spiritual explosion soon to happen in Israel that will have a wonderfully awesome affect in Israel and all the world.

Maven is a Yiddish word that means a person with special knowledge or experience. Evidence of God's grace should be characterized by an ability to smile. The Smiling Maven newsletter is an encouragement for all of us to be smiling mavens, smiling people with special knowledge of God's amazing grace.

Comments are always welcome. Contact us at smilingmaven@yahoo.com or 2820 Eshcol Avenue, Zion IL 60099.

these times, when we do not seem to be doing well, that we might be the most honest with ourselves and with God. I found incredible comfort in Brother Manning’s acknowledgement of the struggling that we do in the midst of struggles. Yet, Jesus’ love for us is not thwarted by our struggle. “He (Jesus) knew that the day would come when faith would no longer offer any drive, reassurance, or comfort; that prayer would lack any sense of reality or progress; that we would echo the cry of Teresa of Avila: ‘Lord, if this is the way you treat your friends, no wonder you have so few!’”² For those of us who go through the reality of struggles like these, Manning’s book draws us to the wonderful reality of grace in the midst of those difficult times.

The Ragamuffin Gospel is a one of the few books that can sufficiently wet your appetite through the preliminary sections and the titles to the chapters. The titles to some of the chapters include: Something is Radically Wrong, Tilted Halos, Freedom from Fear, The Victorious Limp, and A Touch of Folly.

Legitimately, we may all have different tastes; we may all have different needs. What ministers to one person may not minister to another. The Ragamuffin Gospel may not be a good read for everyone. Yet for the person genuinely hungry for grace, wanting to thrive and live in grace, *The Ragamuffin Gospel* will minister that wonderful grace into your life. Thank you to Brother Brennan Manning for writing this book.



Theology Section

Little Known Principles of Christianity³

- #1. There are no good Christians.
- #2. If you agree or disagree with #1 you need to be humbled.
- #3. The number one thing that God is after in His people is pride.
- #4. All the other issues that the believer and the church are concerned about: anger, proper clothing, proper language, smoking, educational issues, substance abuse, sexual sin, etc. etc. are mere flea bites in comparison to pride. It was through pride that the devil became the devil.⁴
- #5. Whether you agree or disagree with #4, God is after your pride.
- #6. If you think that you are humble – you are not.
- #7. Humility is an invisible trait. The truly humble do not know that they are humble.
- #8. Most of the acts that we willfully do in order to look humble are done out of pride.
- #9. What truly humbles us are situations that we do not choose, and would not choose even if given the opportunity to do so.
- #10. What may be humbling for one believer may be a source of pride for another.

The Home Front

Yes, the Weiners are still alive and well in Zion. Both Ruthe and Caleb have completed their first semester of school in Zion. Both have done well. Ruthe, who is in accelerated classes, has mostly A’s on her report card. Caleb, may not have quite as many A’s, but has been on honor roll both grading periods. Art has not received a report card, though, this is not an invitation to the Faith Home Congregation or the Faith Home Ministers to make one up. It is probably safe to say Art’s at least passing. He is alive, breathing, teaching and preaching as opportunity allows. He is still writing this Smiling Maven newsletter.

Ruthe has just finished playing basketball for the Freshman “A” team. Though she enjoyed playing, enjoyed the team friendships, the team did not have a great season. They won some games, could have won a few more, and lost enough to make it a long season. Dad and Caleb attended all the home games and a few of the away games. One of Ruthe’s teammates was the daughter of another Zion pastor, who lives a block away, so they were able to share some of the “taxi” responsibilities for the many practices.



Caleb, though still missing Oshkosh a



lot, has become a bit more settled in Zion. He has made some friends; one named James lived across the street. Unfortunately, James just moved to Waukegan. The boys remain friends, and when possible James spends some weekend time with Caleb. It’s not the same though as having James living across the street. Caleb is faithful as a safety patrol volunteer at school. He often leaves early for this responsibility. Caleb has also become involved in a youth group at a neighboring church. He enjoys this group, and seems to be growing in his walk with Y’shua.⁵

Apologetics Section: The Apologetics section will return in the May 2006 issue. It will normally appear every other issue.

Notes:

- 1. Paul Tillich, *The Shaking of the Foundations* (New York Scribner’s, 1948), pp. 161-62. Quoted in Ragamuffin P.28-29
- 2. Brennan Manning, *Ragamuffin Gospel*, (Multnomah Publishers, Inc. 2000), pp 112-113.
- 3. Scriptural references for each of these ten points are available upon request.
- 4. The main substance of this quote is from C.S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity* (HarperCollins, 2001) p. 122.
- 5. Y’shua - ישׁוּעַ (Hebrew) Jesus

Editors Note: God is after our pride.

