Perseverance and Forgiveness

Zootopia

Vienna Presbyterian Church
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Joshua 1:9; Romans 5:1-15; Colossians 3:12-17
Life is messy. I mess up; you mess up. We make mistakes; we hurt others by our words and our actions. But, more than this, God gives you and me an endless, overflowing supply of grace. **Grace**? It’s like unwrapping a *gift* that we didn’t see coming, a *gift* we certainly don’t deserve. **Grace**? It’s Jesus on the Cross putting to death our past messy, ugly, old life. **Grace** is 2 Corinthians 5:17: “…. Anyone who belongs to Christ (KEY words) has become a new person. Your old life is gone; your new life has begun!” God gives us a **grace** full of second chances and fresh starts!

When I was nine years old, I stole a piece of Bazooka Bubble Gum from Mr. Hansen’s Ben Franklin Five & Dime store. I don’t recommend this – I got into a whoop of trouble! Later, at 15, I actually ended up working for Mr. Hansen after school. Mr. Hansen had shown me such grace and forgiveness that autumn afternoon years before. God gives us “Pass Go-Collect $200” cards and plenty of “do-overs”!

When I was 22, I said “No” to a good friend’s invitation to be his Best Man at his wedding—not one of my finer moments; but Greg and I reconciled two years later. God pours out **grace**; God gives us humility when we’ve blown it. God helps us forgive and to be forgiven.

I’m still messing up. Just a few days ago our dog messed-up in one of our neighbor’s yard! I picked it up, the mess, but it still wasn’t something I should have let my dog do—doo-doo, I mean. I needed to say I was sorry to my neighbor. **Grace**. So often God gives me a “get-out-of-jail-free” card!
With God’s grace and some effort on our part, plus the work of forgiveness, God changes lives – sometimes overnight, but usually gradually, step-by-step. God changes our lives, so that then we can make the world a better place. Today’s movie is Disney’s 2016 ZOOTOPIA. It’s a movie about making the world a better place. And along the way, throughout the movie, God changes lives!

Like Mr. Big, who’s actually a little mole, who plays a mafia Godfather. But when someone does something good for his little mole-daughter, Mr. Big decides to “be kind and pay it forward.” “Gideon Grey,” in his youth he’s a cruel fox who bullies everybody around him; but years later, Gideon Grey becomes a gentle, generous neighbor. You’ll meet him soon. “Nick Wilde,” he’s a fox, too, sly and cunning. Nick behaves like a con man, but he becomes a truly sacrificial best friend. “Judy Hopps,” the folks in Bunny-Burrow don’t think a lowly bunny like Judy is going to amount to much, but Judy becomes the star of the movie. With God’s grace and some effort on our part, plus the work of forgiveness, God changes lives. God changes our lives, so that then we can make the world a better place for God and God’s people.

Let’s start with this “effort” part – the perseverance part. Our oldest daughter, Julia’s very first memory verse when she was a little girl, and still a favorite of hers, is this one from the Book of Joshua, 1:9: “Be strong and courageous; don’t be afraid, don’t be discouraged, for the Lord your God is with you wherever you go.”
This first movie clip is about persevering beyond adversity, about getting back up when you’ve been pushed down. This scene shows a “strong and courageous” Judy Hopps, a “persevering” Judy Hopps standing up for her friends. Now, for our littlest boys and girls, I want to tell you that there are 20 seconds in this scene that startle and scare me a little. You’ll see it – Gideon Grey pushes Judy to the ground, and then with his sharp fox claws he scratches Judy’s bunny-cheek. Not good, not right ever to be mean and cruel to someone! But watch Judy’s awesome response.

A gritty Judy Hopps says, “I don’t know when to quit.” Judy stands up for her friends; she defends them. She’s not going to let Gideon Grey mistreat and bully them! This “be strong and courageous” verse in Joshua is for Judy Hopps, and for all of us – boys and girls, moms and dads, brothers and sisters in Christ – for any of us who are facing adversity, or who are going through a tough time right now; or for any of us needing to stand up for a friend or family member, or needing to stand up for Christ in a world which Connie just prayed well for: for Light shining bright in darkness, for peace over hate, for love silencing evil. Join me in repeating, “Be strong and courageous; don’t be afraid, don’t be discouraged, for the Lord your God is with you wherever you go.”

In the movie, country bunny Judy Hopps becomes a big-time city police officer; she’s the first-ever bunny officer in Zootopia! Gideon Grey tells Judy that she’s not worthy enough, not good enough, not big enough. But Judy shows grit; she’s resourceful and intelligent, confident and brave. You’ve got to see this movie. Judy makes mistakes, but she doesn’t give up or back down in the face of life’s obstacles.
Now Judy is just a Disney animation character. How about a real Bible character named “Persevering Paul”? This is a photo of actor Hugh Jackman, who will be playing the Apostle Paul in an upcoming AMC movie!

Paul, ultimate ambassador for Christ, who walked somewhere between 5 to 10,000 miles on foot; who was almost stoned to death, shipwrecked and thrown in jail. That’s grit. Paul knows perseverance; he knows the results of persevering. In his Letter to the Romans, look at the progression of the character-building that comes from persevering: “Therefore, we can rejoice, too, when we run into trials and sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance [NIV uses “perseverance”], and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, and hope does not disappoint us, because God’s love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit that has been given to us” (Romans 5:3-5).

Judy has inner strength; her parents pray for her; she has the love of family, and she has a trusted friend in Nick. Wow, the core ingredients to living a changed-life: a life of constant prayer; the love of family (church); and a really good soul-friend. How about you? Build this life! In *Zootopia*, Judy teams up with Nick to solve the troubling case of disappearing animals, who, as it turns out, are being poisoned. By God’s grace and her effort, Judy helps to fix a broken world. “Suffering produces endurance; endurance produces character, and character produces hope, and hope does not disappoint us.”
I want to shift now from perseverance to forgiveness. Part of making the world a better place is getting into a right place with your friend or neighbor. God wants to fix a broken world, if you will, by fixing hurting relationships. Here’s Paul again, in Colossians 3:13-14: “Bear with one another and, if anyone has a complaint against another, forgive each other. Just as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive. Above all, clothe yourselves with love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony.”

Forgiveness. When we open our hearts to God, and we see where we’ve gone wrong, and then, after seeing our sin, we turn (we repent) and we tell God we’re sorry, God then starts to do a new good work in us. God desires to make us new when we turn from the hurtful things we’ve done and said, when we turn from the pain we’ve caused God or neighbor. By His grace God is continually helping us to turn towards God!

Look at this clip now. Look and see what God does inside Gideon Grey’s heart over time, years later, when Gideon gets to see Judy again and apologize.

Gideon is really a changed fox! Forgiveness fixes a broken world, one relationship at a time. One good act brings another, and another. Forgiveness begets forgiveness. Watch this, when Judy receives and accepts Gideon’s apology, Judy then has something she needs to say to the friend she has hurt. This next clip actually comes just minutes after the last one! Gideon apologizes to Judy and Judy forgives Gideon. Then Judy apologizes to Nick, and Nick forgives Judy.
See how this beautiful friendship is restored by the work of confession and forgiveness? How about you? Who do you need to forgive, or of whom do you need to ask forgiveness?

Here are four closing thoughts on forgiveness: (1) Remember that God alone is Judge, not us. We are totally reliant on God – for God’s humility and wisdom is the way of forgiveness and reconciliation. (2) Remember it often takes time to really forgive; but God’s Spirit is able to put us into right attitude to ask for forgiveness or to forgive those who’ve hurt us. (3) God can help us overcome whatever negative thoughts are blocking our ability to forgive.

Remember, our Renewing Prayer ministry and our one-on-one Stephen Ministry can both be helpful to you. Last, (4) Remember that you and I only need to look at the Cross of Christ to know His loving-kindness towards each one of us.

With God’s grace and some effort on our part, plus the work of forgiveness, God changes lives. God changes our lives, so that then we can make the world a better place—for Christ, through Christ, because of Christ.

Forgiveness:
1. **Remember that God alone is Judge, not us.**
2. **It often does takes time to forgive;**
3. **God helps us overcome whatever thoughts are blocking our ability to forgive.**
4. **Jesus shows His loving-kindness towards each one of us.**