

Rumor #88 Love made van de Broek faint.

Practicing the Existence of God (excerpted from *Rumors of Another World* by Philip Yancey, published by Zondervan)

Grace is irrational, unfair, unjust, and only makes sense if I believe in another world governed by a merciful God who always offers another chance. "Amazing Grace," a rare hymn that in recent times climbed the charts of popular music, holds out the promise that God judges people not for what they have been but what they could be, not by their past but by their future. John Newton, a gruff and bawdy slave trader, "a wretch like me," wrote that hymn after being transformed by the power of amazing grace.

When the world sees grace in action, it falls silent. Nelson Mandela taught the world a lesson in grace when, after emerging from prison after twenty-seven years and being elected president of South Africa, he asked his jailer to join him on the inauguration platform. He then appointed Archbishop Desmond Tutu to head an official government panel with a daunting name, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. Mandela sought to defuse the natural pattern of revenge that he had seen in so many countries where one oppressed race or tribe took control from another.

For the next two-and-a-half years, South Africans listened to reports of atrocities coming out of the TRC hearings. The rules were simple: if a white policeman or army officer voluntarily faced his accusers, confessed his crime, and fully acknowledged his guilt, he could not be tried and punished for that crime. Hard-liners grumbled about the obvious injustice of letting criminals go free, but Mandela insisted that the country needed healing even more than it needed justice.

At one hearing, a policeman named van de Broek recounted an incident when he and other officers shot an eighteen-year-old boy and burned the body, turning it on the fire like a piece of barbecue meat in order to destroy the evidence. Eight years later van de Broek returned to the same house and seized the boy's father. The wife was forced to watch as policemen bound her husband on a woodpile, poured gasoline over his body, and ignited it.

The courtroom grew hushed as the elderly woman who had lost first her son and then her husband was given a chance to respond. "What do you want from Mr. van de Broek?" the judge asked. She said she wanted van de Broek to go to the place where they burned her husband's body and gather up the dust so she could give him a decent burial. His head down, the policeman nodded agreement.

Then she added a further request, "Mr. van de Broek took all my family away from me, and I still have a lot of love to give. Twice a month, I would like for him to come to the ghetto and spend a day with me so I can be a mother to him. And I would like Mr. van de Broek to know that he is forgiven by God, and that I forgive him too. I would like to embrace him so he can know my forgiveness is real."

Spontaneously, some in the courtroom began singing "Amazing Grace" as the elderly woman made her way to the witness stand, but van de Broek did not hear the hymn. He had fainted, overwhelmed.

Justice was not done in South Africa that day, nor in the entire country during months of agonizing procedures by the TRC. Something beyond justice took place. "Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good," said Paul. Nelson Mandela and Desmond Tutu understood that when evil is done, one response alone can overcome the evil. Revenge perpetuates the evil. Justice punishes it. Evil is overcome by good only if the injured party absorbs it, refusing to allow it to go any further. And that is the pattern of otherworldly grace that Jesus showed in his life and death.

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