

## HEARTBEATS Staying Connected 1/21/2022

Dear Friends in Christ,

GROUP Magazine was the first nationally published magazine for youth ministry. Thirty plus years ago, I submitted and they published a suggestion in their “Try This One” section for “tried-and-true” youth ministry ideas. I called it “Jump the Dollar,” but with inflation, it has now become “Jump the Twenty.” I still use it when I speak to groups, both youth and adult, about grace.

I begin by taking out a twenty-dollar bill and asking who wants it. A number of hands will go up and since I only have one, I tell the group that whoever can jump the length of it while holding on to their toes and not letting go can have it. But you only get one try. Several will come forward to attempt this, but no one succeeds. (Actually, I had one person come back and do it for me. He was a college basketball player and he practiced for several weeks before showing me he could do, though even then, he didn't succeed until the fourth attempt.) After a few failures, the rest of the group lets go of the hope of getting the twenty.

When no one else seems interested in trying any longer, I pick up the twenty and go give it to someone who didn't even make an attempt. Immediately there is some protest. I should at least give it to someone who tried. But it is my twenty to do with as a wish and I've decided to give it to this person. Now it's hers and she can do with it as she wishes. She might decide to try to give it back to me, but I won't take it. She can leave it on the table, but it will stay there until someone else picks it up. She can take it and buy candy with it. She can keep the candy for herself, or she can share it with others. She can put it on a shelf and forget about it. She can put it in the bank or the offering plate or give it away. It's her twenty, a free gift, to do with as she chooses.

This is how grace works. We can't earn God's love. In fact, earning God's love is many times more difficult than jumping a twenty. In truth, it is impossible. There are many who figure they haven't got a chance so why even bother. But in spite of our unworthiness, God graciously gives us love anyway. It's ours. It's a free gift. And we can do with it as we choose. We can try to give it back, but God has given it to us. We can pretend it isn't ours. We can tuck it away and forget about it. We can keep it all to ourselves, or we can share it with others. It's a free gift and we can do with it whatever we choose.

I did this on a men's retreat one time. There was break after my presentation. When we came back in, four people had five-dollar bills at their places. As the weekend progressed, those five-dollar bills became five ones each and the money kept being given from one person to another. Grace upon grace upon grace!

That's how God's grace works. God gives it to us freely and we can do with it as we please. But it's God's hope that we will share it with others and that they, in turn will also share it so that many will know the gracious love of God. Human illustrations have limitations though that fall short of what God can do. In the twenty-dollar bill illustration, the difference is that when we give away the twenty, it doesn't become fives and then ones. It remains a twenty and even grows. It is as we share God's love with others that we discover we have even greater love from God. We have been given God's love as a free gift. It is ours to do with as we choose. What will you do with the love you have graciously received?

In Christ's love,  
Pastor Jeffrey