

Open to Grace

Australian journalist and social commentator Julia Baird has recently published a book entitled *Bright Shining: How Grace Changes Everything*, in which she reflects on the nature of grace in our everyday lives. Grace is one of those spiritual gifts which is often hard to define. Usually, it is regarded as an undeserved gift from God, freely given, not earned, and poured out on all. As the Psalms remind us: *our God is compassionate and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in love* (145).

Baird expands this understanding of grace as a divine gift, to something which is also an intrinsic part of human experience, a way of living and interacting which blesses and nurtures others. As she notes:

...grace is more than simple kindness ... it's wrapped in the everyday, but it is still extraordinary. It spawns generosity, compassion and empathy. It involves understanding, recognising another person's humanity and walking in another's shoes, which can pave the way for forgiveness ... it is what Franciscan author Richard Rohr calls 'unexplainable goodness'... (5).

At a time in our human history when war, violence, hate speech, distrust of institutions and public anger surround us, Baird's invitation to reflect on grace invites us onto a very different path; a path of connection, understanding, shared humanity and human dignity.

While it is impossible to summarise Baird's observations in a short Mercy Moment, we encourage you to read the book and to use extracts from it for your own times of quiet contemplation and also in prayer time shared with others.



The following descriptions of grace are included in the first chapter of Baird's book:

- **Grace is to be fully, thrillingly alive.** None of us have done anything to earn the awe and wonder we witness on this planet, the ability to wander through the natural world and be both diminished and expanded by its glory ... to exist in a state of grace... (8)
- **Grace is something undeserved** ... karma is getting what you deserve, grace is the opposite: forgiving the unforgivable, favouring the undeserving, loving the unlovable ... grace in giving people another chance, the benefit of the doubt, an opportunity to learn and change, can unravel people, redirect futures, melt hearts, heal family rifts, transform lives... (9)
- **Grace is the ability to see good in the other**, to recognise humanity, to tolerate difference and to continuously plough lives, conversations and public debates with the belief that people can change ... (9)
- **Grace is the antithesis of cancel culture** ... every great reform movement, every great movement of justice in history, has been fuelled by a simple gracious belief – that people can change, or be persuaded. That we can appeal to what Abraham Lincoln called 'the better angels of our nature'. To believe that of everyone we meet is an incredible gift – for you and for them (10).

Baird calls for a world in which kindness and compassion are the drivers of social cohesion and much-needed social change. A world in which 'unexplainable goodness' is more and more evident, where selfless social support and activism transforms and renews our connections with others. For Baird, although grace is becoming rarer, it does reveal itself in *flashes and glimmers*, if we are looking. As she says, *we need to be watching for those moments of connection, of love and of light, and moments when we hold and care for one another in the midst of everything ... we need to be open to grace* (18-20).

May grace and peace be yours in abundance in the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord.

2 Peter 1:2

REFLECTION:

Where do you see unexplainable goodness and grace in your community?

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