

**“BUCKETS OF GRACE”**  
**A Sermon Preached at**  
**FIRST UNITED PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH**  
**Belleville, IL**  
**By The Rev Rob Dyer**  
**September 28, 2025**  
(transcribed from audio file)

Siblings in Christ, let's read the Bible together. We're going to go to Paul's letter to the Romans 8:31-39. Listen for God's Word today.

*What then are we to say about these things? If God is for us, who is against us? He who did not withhold his own Son but gave him up for all of us, how will he not with him also give us everything else? Who will bring any charge against God's elect? It is God who justifies. Who is to condemn? It is Christ who died, or rather, who was raised, who is also at the right hand of God, who also intercedes for us. Who will separate us from the love of Christ? Will affliction or distress or persecution or famine or nakedness or peril or sword? As it is written,*

*“For your sake we are being killed all day long;  
we are accounted as sheep to be slaughtered.”*

*No, in all these things we are more than victorious through him who loved us. For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord. NRSVue*

This is the Word of the Lord. Thanks be to God.

I remember when I discovered the power of IA. I was 10 years old in fourth grade when I learned the power of IA. It was revealed to me through the gifted creativity of two young gentlemen in my fourth-grade class, John Jacobus and Art Stutzman. They made a brilliant discovery in fourth grade and that was that if you took IA and put it at the end of my name, it was funny. Now, some of you are thinking Pastor Rob Ia. I don't get it. My last name is Dyer. Yeah! Even better, evidently at that time, there was a lovely little song you could sing about running the first and second and third, and it had little clever rhymes in it. And during this particular week in fourth grade, John Jacobus and Art Stutzman, I'm saying their full names over and

over again to thoroughly prosecute them on the record today, proceeded to sing this song all day, under their breath in the classroom. Then we got out into playtime at Ellis Elementary School, running around out there, playing games and the whole time they were swirling around me singing this particular song, calling me by my new name that they had dubbed me. And all the other kids thought it was hilarious.

I did not share that same joy that day. In fact, we're going to say this was one of little Robbie Dyer's not good Christian days, because what rose up in me was such anger and frustration and they just kept singing it at me over and over again.

Finally, we got to the end of recess and we're runnin' back to get in line for recess and Art wouldn't let it go. He just kept singing the little song and calling me that and kids were laughing as he was running to get back in line. So, he's running to get back in line and I'm running behind him. And I decided that the wrath and justice that was necessary at this moment was for me to push him.

Now I don't know if you know what happens when a fourth-grade boy, running at full speed, gets pushed from behind, but they fly. And Art Stutzman flew that day on the playground at Ellis Elementary School. Unfortunately, we were not still in the grassy area. Now look. He's alive. Okay? Calm down. This is not a confession. I'm not going to jail today. Okay? Remember there was a lot of persecution up to this moment.

I pushed him and we were not in the grass. We were not on the hard concrete pavement. We were in this nether region between, which had a lot of rocks. Yeah. Not good. It's not a good story. I pushed him and he flew, and he kissed the ground hard. He got up and both of his knees were all red and there was blood going down and his one elbow had a big scrape and blood coming down his arm and the first thing I thought...the first thing I thought was, I regret what I've done and I confess it before the Lord God Almighty and I beg for forgiveness. NO! The first thing I thought was one, I'm gonna get in trouble at school and at home.

So, he's down on the ground and I'm like, "Art. Art. You're okay right?" I mean there's blood and he's crying. "You're okay Art. You're okay. You know this was an accident, right? You know! I just bumped into you. Right?"

I'm trying to sell this story. The problem was that the supervisor out on recess...I did it right in front of her. I mean she couldn't have paid for better seats than what she had for this show, and she saw the whole thing. She's like, "You better go down to the office and get the nurse to look at that. And Rob, you're going with him and you're going to the principal's office with him."

So, we're walking down the hallway together and the whole time I'm workin' Art. I'm like, "Art, you know I didn't mean to do it. Art, I just ran into you. I mean, we just ran and bumped into you. Right?"

He's crying and he can't hold it together. He's in that crying thing where it's like he can't get a word to come out of his mouth and finally we get halfway there and I'm like, this is not going well. So, I get in front of him, and I put my hands on his shoulders and I don't let him go. Again, not my finest day. I'm like, "Art. You know I didn't mean to do that. You know I didn't mean to do it. It was just an accident." I'm totally lying. "You know I didn't mean to do that. It was just an accident. Right?"

He's crying hard. Is that a, yes? A no? I don't know. So, we get down to the principal's office, open up the door and he comes in. You know, there's blood here and blood here and he's like, "What happened?"

And Art goes, "HE PUSHED ME! HE PUSHED ME!" He didn't say it once. He had to repeat it.

The truth is, is that I really didn't care about Art Stutzman that day. I just cared about getting in trouble. I just didn't want to be in trouble.

You know grace sounds really good because it means forgiveness. Right? It means forgiveness for all the wrong doings we do, even if that little punk said our name like that all recess long and totally deserved what happened to him. Even if we didn't deserve it there is still an opportunity for forgiveness. We like forgiveness. That's good cause we know we need it.

So, when we hear words like Romans 8, there is nothing can separate you from the love of God. There's nothing about what you've done. There's nothing about what has happened to you in this world, whatever circumstances come upon you, there's nothing can separate you from the love of God. And that love of God is so clearly revealed in grace, in forgiveness. That means it is available to you and that's such great news.

But the other part of Romans 8 means that it also applies to Art and to John. Let's not let John Jacobus off. He was a conspirator. But it applies to those other people, those people who wrong you, those people who are broken in your life. Nothing can separate them from the love of God and now we're in a situation where while we

enjoy this relationship, this love, we have to look to our right and to our left and see those who are less than blessings in our lives and understand that they are loved too.

Now when we speak of forgiveness, I want to be very clear. This does not mean that any of us are meant to have a life of being a victim, of being abused. That is wrong and justice is needed for that, but most of the struggles that you and I have with grace and forgiveness do not come from such atrocities upon us. It comes from all the other little things that nip and pick and pick and pick in our lives.

But this lesson of trying to look at every situation, when things go a little sideways, things go a little wrong, something isn't working, someone got hurt, looking for a way to pour a bucket of grace on it. I'm telling you personally, it has helped me. I didn't have this bucket of grace when I was in fourth grade, but as I've grown in the faith, and hopefully grown up since I was ten years old, some would argue not, but I have found that walking into situations of life, armed with a bucket of grace, does a whole lot more for this world, for my life, for my relationships than any amount of wrath or justice or righteousness that I think I can bring into the situation.

This series that we're going through – favorites. It's not just me getting stuff out of my system before Pastor Alex gets back. Maybe a little bit. But honestly what it is, is these four weeks have been me sharing with you, something very personal. These are the lessons that have really helped me in my own faith. To try to be the kind of person who can find that bucket of grace when it's really hard to find sometimes. And I need help doing it. And I'm not perfect. And sometimes that little ten-year-old Robbie Dyer comes out, but the fifty-four-year-old is still trying to find that bucket of grace all the time.

So, these four weeks we had – the first week was Genesis, the Book of Dysfunctional Families. I remember the first time that someone really walked me through Genesis, and I saw like, oh my goodness. The Bible isn't filled with these amazing, wonderful people, it's filled with messed up people. And to understand that God has a place for and a way of using messed up people. Truly dysfunctional, harmful people and it's out of the mess ups that God does some of God's best work. That was eye opening to me. That helped me to look at the world and say, I'm going to expect brokenness, and then I'm going to expect God to show up, then I'm going to try and follow God's angle on this. That's helped me out tremendously in my own personal life of faith. So, I selfishly wanted to share that with you.

The second was, The Bible in One Sunday, when we covered that. And again in a similar way, like going through Genesis, when I got into seminary and we had the ability to go – I remember, Bible Blitz with Dr. Carson Brison and we did the whole

Bible in one semester. I remember having that entire message of God's Word all put together like that and seeing the big story of what God reveals through scripture, and I remember thinking, okay. This makes sense now cause when we take the Bible little bits at a time, it gets to feel like a giant rule book. Do this. Don't do this. Do more of this. Do less of this. Don't do this. Ooh, don't do this. Don't do that. Do this. It can just feel like a bunch of that.

But the truth is, is that this beautiful arc of the Bible tells the story of I'm going to give you guidance to help you and I have forgiveness for when you don't, and I want a relationship of love, and I want to invite you into participation. I'm like, yes! I want to tell other people about this. I want this to be at the center of my life. It made it so much easier to live a life of faith. Again - imperfect. Ten-year-old shows up once in a while, but it made it easier.

Now Improv Sunday. I'm gonna admit, I just think that's fun, but I also know this. It's a Sunday about trust. At some point in my life, I learned that even when all my plans are insufficient, or when there is no plan at all, there's still the opportunity that God's going to show up. I think if we live into that, and I trust that Gods going to show up every time that we try to pull off one of those Improv Sundays.

The second part of what I love about that is the trust we have as a church family. We had a visitor that day who pulled me aside and said, "That was great! We could never get away with that at our church."

I said, "Well, they've just kinda learned to put up with me now."

But there is a trust. You trust that this is going somewhere. You trust that there is a message and to have that trust between pastor and congregation is huge. I think one of the other things I learned is how important it is that we work very hard here to build trust between one another. Trust that we will not harm one another. Trust that we ultimately want to care for one another. Trust that we are all really trying to serve God to the best of our ability. To just trust that. And so that is what Improv Sunday is.

And for me Buckets of Grace just pulls it all together. I know the staff is probably tired of me talking about Buckets of Grace cause I do it all the time. And the leadership hears about it as well, but it's true. In fact, sometimes we'll be talking about this situation that came up, this happened and da da da da da and then one of them will go like, "I know, Rob. Buckets of grace! Buckets of grace!" So, that's what this has been about.

All that leading up to buckets of grace is that like, isn't it hard sometimes to find your bucket of grace? Aren't there people that just know how to push the buttons, or sing the little songs, or call you by the little names, or whatever it is that gets to you in this life, and there are moments where maybe not even someone acting out specifically, it's just the circumstance situation and just wears you down and the less than the best version of yourself comes out.

There have been little lessons along the way that have helped me to find my bucket of grace and so on this last Sunday in the series I wanted to share those with you. Honestly this is just what has worked for me so that I can find forgiveness. Am I perfect in my forgiveness? No. I have people in my life that I have a really hard time forgiving and I work on that. But in the moment, I think we should all be seeking to find that bucket of grace.

So, I had to write these down because it was a lot to hold in my head. There are five things that really helped me.

The one thing I try to remember is this. Most people are trying their best and they are not trying to be the villain of their story, or your story. We often only hear of bad people with bad intentions. I heard a speaker last night who said, "On the news they don't tell you about all the planes that landed safely. You only hear about the one that didn't." That's what news does. The good stuff, the things that happen most of the time, that's not news so we don't hear about that, but most people are trying their best.

The second thing is, most people want to participate in joy, but all people are broken and it's that brokenness in them that gets in the way. It's the brokenness in each of us that gets in the way of us participating in the joy that God has intended for us. And that helps me. It helps me remember that when I'm seeing someone who is not participating in the joy, maybe being less than their best self, what's broken? What happened to them? That kind of leads me to the next thing which is –

Frustration and pain builds up in people and sometimes it comes out because people just found a justified outlet. When things aren't going well you don't know the back story of that person you just interacted with. To you, that's just a character that walked in the moment, but they just lived a whole life before they walked into your scene.

Had an instance once with someone who is here. Had terrible news in their family. Had a medical diagnosis that indicated that they would not be able to continue in the treatment they had, and they were having excruciating back pain. I knew none of

these things at that moment. As they walked through the church, we had a set up for upcoming special Sunday and it meant that instead of walking straight through to get to their car, they had to walk around this whole setup. And every step they took was painful and I didn't know that. What I did hear was, as they walked around, they said, "Why is all this stuff out? This is ridiculous. It's a mess. It's a mess out here and now I don't understand why we do things like this." And they were going off. But I don't think that was about the tables, or what we were doing that Sunday, I think that was about what I later learned was the back pain, the medical diagnosis, the family issues. They were just feeling all that and there was no place to let it out and they got an outlet.

The fourth thing – anger and negativity come from fear, but joy and optimism come from hope. When you feel someone being so angry and negative with you, it's so often they are afraid of something. They're afraid that something's changing. They're afraid they are not valued anymore. They're hurting in some way and if you can think of it that way, it's a little easier to take when anger comes at you and the negativity comes at you.

Again, no one should be a victim. No one should be taken advantage of or abused, but when we find joy and optimism it's usually because we found some hope. And I think that as the people of God we gotta do our best to hold on to that eternal hope we have in Christ to carry us through all the dark valleys.

The last thing is that I do believe that love has the power, as scripture says, to bind everything together in perfect harmony and that love is most clearly revealed through forgiveness.

I just wrote those things down because I sat down and I thought to myself, what is it that really helps you to get through this stuff sometimes, Rob? What is it that really helps you to forgive, to see the best in the moment, the best in people. And those are just the things that have worked for me, and you might have your own list, but goodness, we've been loved so well, and we know this love because of our faith. We oughta work to find those buckets of grace; cause Lord knows people in your life need them.

I hope some of this month has been helpful to you as well.

To God be the glory.  
Halleluiah and Amen.