

## **Grace**

By Bernita Tuinenga – Executive Director of Volunteers in Service

I am a perfectionist. I worry about getting things wrong. I like to stick to the rules, get things right and try to be the best I can be. Self-improvement isn't a bad thing. But the problem with having a perfectionist attitude towards yourself is that we often transfer this attitude towards other people. We set our own high standards for how we expect them to behave. However, inevitably other people won't always meet our expectations. They will let us down. They are imperfect. I need to learn how to show God's grace to imperfect people.

What kinds of things make you mad? What are your pet hates? What annoys you most about people?

When people are late or don't show up?

When people talk about the weather (is this just a British thing?)?

When people brag about their children's achievements on Facebook?

When people drive so close behind you that you can see the spot on their nose in your rear view mirror?

When really tall people sit directly in front of you at the cinema when the rest of the row is empty?

When people wearing earphones have their music turned full blast in public spaces so you are tormented by the tinny beats emanating from their iPod?

We all have our pet hates and things which annoy us that other people do. Mostly we swallow our annoyance quietly, maintain the expected etiquette of the situation and continue to be polite and respectable.

However, what about the people closer to home? Our close friends? Our spouse? Our kids? How do we manage the little things that annoy us? With the same restraint?

Recently, I lost my Kindle. At first I didn't think anything of it, assuming I'd misplaced it and that it would turn up at some point. After three days of it remaining missing I was at my wits end. I don't lose things very often and to lose my Kindle was like losing my right arm! I'd not been able to read and I was starting to get extremely twitchy.

I'd interrogated the kids several times, but they denied all knowledge of its whereabouts. My husband had joined me in turning the house upside down and we searched every possible (and impossible) place it could be – even the recycling bin!

One morning I woke up feeling the now familiar sense of frustration about my missing Kindle. As I was preparing breakfast my eyes fell on my daughter's lunch bag. It had been kicking around the house for a while as she didn't use it for packed lunches and had enjoyed using it instead to collect things in. I had grown tired of it hanging around and had put it on the shelf with the others a couple of days earlier.

Worth a look, I thought. Sure enough, sitting neatly in my my daughter's lunch bag was my Kindle! I cannot express how much joy and relief I felt.

As I said, during the time my Kindle was missing I was incredibly frustrated. It is so annoying not being able to find something. It would have been easy for me to have taken this frustration out on the rest of the family. To have blamed them all for it going missing. To have moaned about their lack of care for other people's property.

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In this instance I am relieved to say that this was not how I behaved. As frustrated as I was, and as much as I was convinced that it was quite likely a member of my family was responsible for my Kindle's whereabouts, I didn't get grouchy.

But be under no illusion that I normally have this kind of saintly patience! There are many times where the little things the people close to me do that annoy me are expressed towards them in some sharp, cutting words of criticism. When my husband, kids or close friends don't meet the expectations I have of them I often tell them in no uncertain terms!

*So, as those who have been chosen of God, holy and beloved, put on a heart of compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience; bearing with one another, and forgiving each other, whoever has a complaint against anyone; just as the Lord forgave you, so also should you. Beyond all these things put on love, which is the perfect bond of unity. Colossians 3:12-14*

When we have expectations of what other people should or shouldn't do we can easily be let down. What may be important to us is not necessarily important to others.

I may think that my kids shouldn't leave every door or drawer open in the house behind them, but they don't give it a second thought.

I may think that my friends should arrive at the time we have arranged to meet, but they may be happy to be delayed by a valuable conversation with someone else.

I may think that my husband should not use our study as a store cupboard for all his work equipment, but he may be happy to work in this zone of production.

God wants us to treat others with grace. Undeserved favour. If we were to only dish out encouragement, friendly words or kindness to those we feel deserve it we may seldom get the opportunity. But if we are prepared to show tolerance for the things others do that we don't like, hold back our judgements and love them imperfections we bless them with God's grace.