

# THE OVERLOOKED

Ministering Grace  
in a Broken World

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## CHAPTER 1

# The Uninvited

As the servant eagerly set out on his journey throughout the Palestinian countryside, he could not help but remind himself of his good fortune. He had been asked to perform a coveted task for his master. His master had selected him from all the servants in his household to deliver invitations to a grand banquet that his master was hosting. Everyone in this community knew that his master, the kindest and most generous man known to all, had incomparable banquets. However, this one was to be one like none other. Rumors of this banquet had been circulating for a long time, generating a great anticipation throughout the land, especially by all within the master's estate. Now here he was, a lowly servant, delivering the official invitations when the master could have given this honor to servants with higher positions, who were worthier. The servant's daily goal was to please his master. As he ran through the countryside, he could see in the distance the extravagant homestead of the first guest to whom he was to extend an invitation. The wealthy landowner happened to be outside his home, leading a beautiful, black horse out

of its stable. Excitedly the servant approached this prominent citizen of the community, whose wealth and possessions were well known to all. As he handed the invitation to the invitee, the stately landowner called the servant by name. "What have we here? Oh, yes, an invitation to your master's great banquet which we have been hearing about for some weeks." To be recognized by such a man of distinction in the community was considered by the servant to be a great honor. However, the prestigious invited guest frowned as he read the elegant script on the piece of costly parchment. "Sadly, I must decline this invitation," he told the servant, "as I have just purchased a plot of land, and even as we speak, I am on my way to go see it. This is obviously a priority for me. Please convey to your master my disappointment at my inability to be present for his great feast as I will not be back in time to attend." Abruptly the landowner turned from the servant, mounted his horse, and rode away without further word.

Embarrassed and saddened, the servant reasoned that he should not expect everyone invited to give a favorable response. However, he recognized that his master would be disappointed due to this valued friend dismissing the event. The servant quickly turned his attention to the next guest on his list rather than dwelling on the rejection. He realized that he was going to have to hasten his pace to accomplish his assignment. Shortly, the landscape began to change into acres and acres of fertile farmland. Within minutes he came upon the farmer to whom he was to extend the next invitation. The farmer was surveying his property from where he stood in the field. A cordial welcome was extended by the farmer to the servant who then explained the purpose of his

visit. After handing the farmer an invitation, the servant waited patiently as the invitation was perused. The farmer looked up sheepishly as he explained, “I am sorry, but I have purchased five pair of oxen for plowing my field. As you can see, it is the season for plowing and cultivating my land. I must immediately test and train them to ensure a plentiful harvest. Please ask your master to excuse me from his banquet as I just do not have the time.” The servant nodded and quickly made his exit.

Unable to understand the reactions he was receiving to an event that he did not think anyone would turn down, the servant began to feel a sense of frustration. Hastily he proceeded forward on his journey. Next on his list was a young, recently married couple who lived nearby. With reticence the servant approached the door to the couple’s modest home. Upon hearing the knock, the young husband appeared at the door. The servant handed him the invitation for the couple. The husband scanned the request for their attendance at the banquet and indignantly gave it back remarking, “Don’t you know that I am bound to my new wife for the first year of our marriage and cannot attend such an event?” Undeterred by this inaccurate explanation of a marital custom which pertained to a new husband going to war, not a new husband simply being married, the servant acknowledged that perhaps this was the young man’s interpretation. He then pointed out to the husband that there was an overriding law for Jewish males to attend at least one feast of this magnitude every year. At this point, the servant recognized that the young man’s excuse represented his choice not to attend. Growing angry, the servant departed swiftly before this debate escalated into an argument.

The servant continued throughout the day to get the same response as he proceeded to the home of each banquet invitee. Without exception, all of the invitees excused themselves. This was disheartening to the servant, not only because he knew these people were going to miss out on a great feast, but because he anticipated how hurt his lord would be when he found out that all of the invitees had rejected his request. As the sun began to set, the servant made his way home.

As he drew near to the master's mansion, the servant's steps grew slower and slower. He did not want to report to the master how unsuccessful he had been, which was now compounded by the fact that it was so close to the appointed time of the feast. Preparations were nearing completion, and there was not a single guest coming. The master read the servant's countenance as he approached and inquired, "They are not coming, are they?" The servant could manage only a simple head nod. "It's not your fault," the master said to the servant.

Next the servant witnessed something he had never seen demonstrated by the master—he became very angry. Then the master instantly ordered, "Quickly, get out into the city streets and alleys. Collect all who look like they need a square meal, all the misfits and homeless and wretched you can lay your hands on and bring them here" (Luke 14:21, Eugene Peterson's paraphrase of the Bible, *The Message*).

Out the door and hastily into the night, the servant ran beckoning to all other servants who were willing to help the master to fill the banquet room to join him. "We must gather any horses, donkeys, wagons, and carts available to bring them in. The banquet is made ready, and we have no

guests.” Many servants joined in, and they headed into the city. The servant had never gone into the city at this time of night and was shocked at what he saw. Despite his fears, he had confidence in the words of his master.

First, the servant noticed a man lying in the shadows with an empty flagon of wine on the ground beside him. “My master is having a great feast tonight, and you are invited. Climb into my wagon, and I will transport you there,” he said to the intoxicated man.

“You mean your master will entertain me in my condition?” the man slurred.

“Yes!” said the servant.

The man slowly crawled into the wagon and began to converse with the servant. He appeared to be something of a spokesperson for this sordid community. “By the way, my name is Simon. Can some of my friends come also?” he inquired. “If they can, I will direct you to them.”

“Lead on,” said the servant.

Within seconds the word “Mary?” was shouted by the drunken man. Emerging from a darkened doorway with a baby in her arms was a woman in tattered clothing. As she approached, Simon explained to the servant that this lady was treated ruthlessly by her husband, abandoned, and then left to fend for herself. “Get in the wagon, Mary! We are going to a great banquet hosted by this servant’s master! Can you believe it?”

Mary handed her baby to Simon and then was helped into the cart by the servant. For the first time in many days, a smile swept across her face at the thought that someone like this servant and his master cared for her and her baby



enough to invite them to an event normally attended only by the rich and famous.

Simon then directed the servant to another dark, narrow street from which they heard loud, almost incoherent shouts. Emerging from the shadows was a muscular man in his forties with a long scar across his face. He aggressively approached the wagon in a threatening manner until he saw Simon. Simon cried out, "It's alright, Claudius. This is a good man who is taking us to a magnificent banquet. Come join us."

The man stopped, and his demeanor quickly changed to one of paranoia. "No, you are trying to trick me just like those Germanic soldiers tricked me after I was captured at the Battle of Teutoburg Forest. You are going to torture me, aren't you?"

The servant compassionately assured the former Roman centurion, "No, I promise you if you join us you will be treated kindly and respectfully. Please come with us. My master is very generous, and he has a great feast prepared."

Meekly the former Roman soldier inquired, "You mean I would be allowed to come to this banquet, too?"

Smiling, the servant reached out his right hand to pull the man aboard the wagon stating, "Most certainly!"

Throughout this section of the city, word was spreading about the great feast. A prostitute was shamelessly standing in plain view in the street as the servant stopped the wagon in front of her. Naively the servant asked, "Do you want to attend a royal banquet?"

The prostitute chuckled, "That's the first time I have ever been offered that proposal." Then she noticed the servant's stoic demeanor. "You're serious, aren't you? As much as I



would love to accompany you, your master is never going to let me enter his property, much less his banquet room.”

The servant retorted, “You don’t know my master, ma’am. He is the kindest and most generous man you will ever meet.”

Touched by the servant’s sincerity, she replied, “Yes, I will join you,” and she was helped into the wagon as Simon extended a hand.

After a short distance the servant abruptly stopped the wagon as he almost ran over a man using a crutch to walk while trying to help his blind friend. “I heard about a magnificent banquet, and I was hoping you were going to it,” the man with the crutch said. “I was afraid we would be left out! If you are going that way, can we ride with you?”

The servant smiled. “Yes, we are headed that way. Let us help you into the wagon.”

With his wagon full, the servant turned around and headed back to his master’s mansion. As he surveyed the streets, he couldn’t help but weep with joy as there were horses, donkeys, and wagons overloaded with the overlooked of this community, just as the master had requested, and they were all headed to the master’s banquet. He knew that this sight was going to bring joy to the master.

As if on cue, the song “Clean” by Natalie Grant began emanating from the Sirius XM radio in my office. The song broke my concentration, seemingly speaking the words that would be spoken by each member of this disparate group of misfits when they arrived at the banquet and in thankfulness fell at the feet of the master, “There’s nothing too dirty that You can’t make worthy. . . . I am clean.”

Earlier that day I had a counseling session with a twenty-six-year-old woman who recounted to me the pain she had endured in her relatively short life. Her parents divorced before she was six, her mother died when she was thirteen, and her father married a cruel woman who beat her repeatedly. At age seventeen she was able to leave the home. She has struggled with depression, anxiety, and substance abuse throughout her life. My heart went out to her, and the images of this parable along with the words of this song began reverberating through my mind as I listened to her. She is representative of “the overlooked” that are depicted in the banquet parable. I learned during the session that this young lady has a heart that is sensitive to God. Hopefully her healing will continue, with the help of tools she obtains during counseling sessions.

In the Parable of the Great Banquet, I am the servant. You are the servant. Likewise, I am His body, and you are His body. We are the only body He has on earth now that He has ascended into Heaven. I am not referring to the corporate body of the church, but an individual body in which His Spirit resides, and which makes itself a conduit for Him to work His will. We are partnering with Jesus, following His lead. Note in the parable that the master did not extend the invitations or compel the invitees to come to the banquet; the servant did. And where did the servant find the invitees? In the field.

Who exactly are these initially uninvited or overlooked souls recorded in the Parable of the Great Banquet in Luke 14? I believe they are the abused, the traumatized, the broken, and the hurting in our communities whose pain is often manifest in addictions and mental illness. They are also

church members: the couple who just lost a child; the sister or brother who recently had a limb amputated; the wife who discovered her husband has been viewing pornography for the past five years; the sister who lives in guilt because she had an abortion prior to coming to the Lord; or the saint who stills struggles with grief over the loss of a child, parent, or spouse. Could it be that this parable is suggesting that those plagued by such challenges are a significant element of the mission field of the twenty-first century? What are we doing to accomplish what the Lord has told us to do with these distressed groups? We need to realize our mission is not only to those outside the doors of our churches but to those sitting silently, suffering on our church pews.

Paul admonished the churches of Galatia to “bear . . . one another’s burdens, and so fulfil the law of Christ” (Galatians 6:2). The Greek word translated *burdens* in this verse means to bear “troublesome moral faults.” “Moral faults”—might this description be extended to include viewing porn, drug and alcohol abuse, or having had an abortion? Thayer adds clarity to the term *burden* as it is used in verse 5, “of faults, the consciousness of which oppresses the soul.” It can be inferred that Paul was exhorting the church to comfort and love those in their midst who were experiencing difficulties.

Through these biblical references we have been alerted to our mission in these last days. We have been directed not only to reach out to the overlooked who have not yet received salvation but to help heal those in our midst who are hurting and distressed.

I grew up in the 1950s and 1960s. From my perspective, this era was a time when mental health problems seemingly did not exist in the world. During the same timeframe in