

Uncommon Graces. By John Vawter. Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress, 1998. 191 pp. Paper, \$11.00.

This popular Christian-living book by John Vawter may be one of the most important books for Christians to read. In an age when Christians are a misunderstood minority, it is critical to know how we should respond to those who malign and misrepresent us. In *Uncommon Graces*, Vawter chronicles how we can respond in a Christ-like manner to a hostile world.

In Part One, Vawter introduces the seven uncommon graces of gentleness, attentiveness, loyalty, candor, mercy, kindness, and repentance (pp. 17-134).

In Part Two the author unveils his game plan on how to nurture the above uncommon graces (pp. 137-85).

The seven uncommon graces are treated equally well throughout the book. Each chapter focuses on the primary characteristics and benefits of each grace. Vawter tackles practical issues like how to respond to an “in your face” society in a gentle manner (pp. 17-34); how to be humble, give up the need to win, and be willing to admit fault (pp. 37-56); and how to demonstrate loyalty (pp. 57-70), honesty, (pp. 71-87), mercy (pp. 89-104), and kindness (pp. 105-19) in all one’s relationships.

The final chapter on repentance (pp.121-34) is also quite helpful. In this chapter Vawter helps the reader deal with relational conflict. The author touches on helpful issues such as how to listen to criticism and what to do if someone refuses to reconcile.

The following quotes will best express the flavor of this book. In chapter 1 on gentleness, Vawter writes, “If we want to demonstrate the uncommon grace of Jesus to a world that worships power, we must set aside our combativeness to embrace gentleness” (p. 19).

In chapter 2 Vawter writes on attentiveness, “Admitting our limited understanding, especially in relation to spiritual truth, is a mark of humility” (p. 46).

On loyalty, Vawter writes in chapter 3, “Sometimes the finest hour is not how heroic we are defending our cause but how honorable we are in surrendering it” (p. 68).

In chapter 4, which deals with candor, Vawter writes, “When others are candid, they give us an opportunity to grow in our personal lives and develop character” (p. 74).

In chapter 5 Vawter writes of mercy, “It is important not to confuse mercy with sympathy. It is not a feeling but an action. It moves. It motivates. It makes a difference in people’s lives” (p.92).

Most readers will appreciate Vawter’s candor when, speaking about kindness, he writes in chapter 6, “The crisis of Christians in our society is not so much in the way we think about Christianity but in the way we live it out” (p. 117). This is the crux of Vawter’s book. He believes that it is critical that Christians live well and be agents of grace who distill the light of the gospel in a dark world.

In the three remaining chapters, Vawter discusses the “one another” commands (pp.137-54), accountability (pp.155-69), and living life according to the Golden Rule (pp. 171-82).

The strength of this book is that it is an easy and captivating read, replete with story after story that will keep the reader riveted. Since he has served as a pastor, seminary president, doctoral professor, parachurch minister, husband, and father, Vawter has countless experiences to share.

A weakness of the book is a tendency to rely on *experiential* rather than *scriptural* support.

We who have the message of God’s free gift of grace ought to be on the frontlines in fulfilling this kingdom agenda. Along the way, it is worth heeding Vawter’s exhortations to be people who exude the uncommon graces of the Christ-like life.