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## **Feminine Grace**

When I volunteered for the theme of grace, I had a clear idea. Grace is a simple concept, I thought. Much of what is written about grace is heavily into Christian doctrine and God speak. People of all major religions understand and talk about grace in a similar way. There are different forms of the word grace, which makes searching for quotes a quirky task sprinkled with bits of Grace Kelly, athletic body control, and good will. I was thwarted a couple dozen times reading and looking for source material. Along the way, in search of information on Hindu female deities, I learned that elephants have 90 pressure points which have been used for thousands of years by mahouts (traditional Indian elephant handlers) to elicit specific behaviors. OK, totally not what I was after, but fascinating nonetheless. This talk has been evading my efforts to research and present information. So, I'm relying on my heart to guide us to share my ideas about feminine grace.

Most people generally agree that spiritual grace is a divinely given blessing, gift or talent. For those who fly in the face of universal salvation, it is unearned, no good works are needed to experience grace. Many insist that faith is required to receive grace. I think appreciation and gratitude are all that is required.

We are all in this room today as a result of feminine grace. Every living person on this earth is the product of this unique grace. Feminine grace celebrates the divine in the mundane, the everyday, and the ordinary. It also celebrates the exceptional, the miraculous, and the transformational. Whether we are God believers or not, I think we all recognize bits of grace when we experience them.

Women have many roles in different societies of the world, but there is great commonality in their domestic tasks. Despite egalitarian ideas, most of these chores are actually still done by women all over the world. In 60% of U.S. households, women do all or most of the housework. I have received the benefit of the countless tasks my mother performed in our home. The thousands of loads of laundry, the dishes, and the clean house are all things I realize, with gratitude, were of her labor. What's for dinner,

Mom? The nurturing care and feeding of a family is quite ordinary, and it's grace for those who receive it.

Feminine grace is undeniably related to biology. Women are the source of life. Our bodies produce milk that nourishes and sustains an infant for the first few months of life. The female body reclaims and renews itself on a monthly basis for much of our lives. It is a reminder, like spring, that new beginnings are possible. Our female brains are wired to communicate verbally, to notice and attend to those who are more vulnerable, and to maintain social groups. These are pretty incredible superpowers. If you've witnessed or experienced childbirth, you've truly seen the miracle of reproduction. It's awe-inspiring. In my years as a doctor, I delivered about 900 babies. I gained tremendous respect for women and a complete sense of awe that it is all so beautifully designed by nature.

Parenthood is the ultimate transformative experience for most of us. We are responsible for a new life. That little one is completely dependent on us. We love completely outside ourselves. Our focus is forever changed. Female grace is the essential component in the process of becoming a parent.

Across many cultures, certain personality traits and behaviors are identified as feminine. While both men and women possess and express these same qualities, women tend to exhibit them more. I like to think of these traits as graces.

While women often excel at verbal communication, a reciprocal skill is listening. Being listened to is so important. Feeling heard is genuine validation; it makes us feel connected to another person. As our technology grows, personal connections are vital for our well-being.

Both socially and physically, it is definitely feminine to be vulnerable. Chivalry is largely based on the premise of female vulnerability. In our culture, men are not supposed to show vulnerability, which has created a lot of emotionally stunted people. But being open, putting oneself out there, and taking calculated risks is essential to forming authentic and enduring emotional bonds. The author, therapist, and researcher, Brené Brown has studied vulnerability and shame for more than a decade. She has given several TED talks and in one, tells a hilarious story of being followed around a store by an enthusiastic fan of her work and presentations calling, "Hey! "Vulnerability TED" It's

YOU!" I highly recommend her work, which covers a variety of topics other than vulnerability.

Empathy is another trait typically assigned to females. Really **understanding** and **feeling** other people's feelings can be difficult. Buddhism teaches that empathy is the most difficult skill to master. It is of value because it helps us understand one another at a deep level. True empathy is healing. It fosters compassion. If there's one thing we need more of in our country right now, it's compassion.

In most cultures, the primary caretakers are women. Child rearing, care of elders, and the primary responsibility for sustaining a family unit are considered female duties. A large part of maintaining societal structure is providing care to those who need it. A group without caretakers is in trouble.

Feminine grace encompasses many themes, all vital to humanity. As women, we are endowed with a grace-filled biology. We possess many traits and behaviors that provide grace to ourselves and others around us. Our whole world is fundamentally shaped by feminine grace.

