

Raspberry Lattes & Grace

BY MONTE WOLVERTON

A couple of weeks ago my wife, Kayte, and I loaded our two Rat Terriers, Meg and Kirby, into the car and headed to our local Starbucks. Patrons of our local Starbucks are welcome to bring their dogs to join them on the patio, which affords a great view of the mountains.

Kayte staked out a table while I went inside to get raspberry lattes and muffins. Back at the table, I set the lattes down and Kayte handed me Kirby's leash. As I reached for

the leash, my hand hit my cup and raspberry latte went all over the table, the patio and even Kirby.

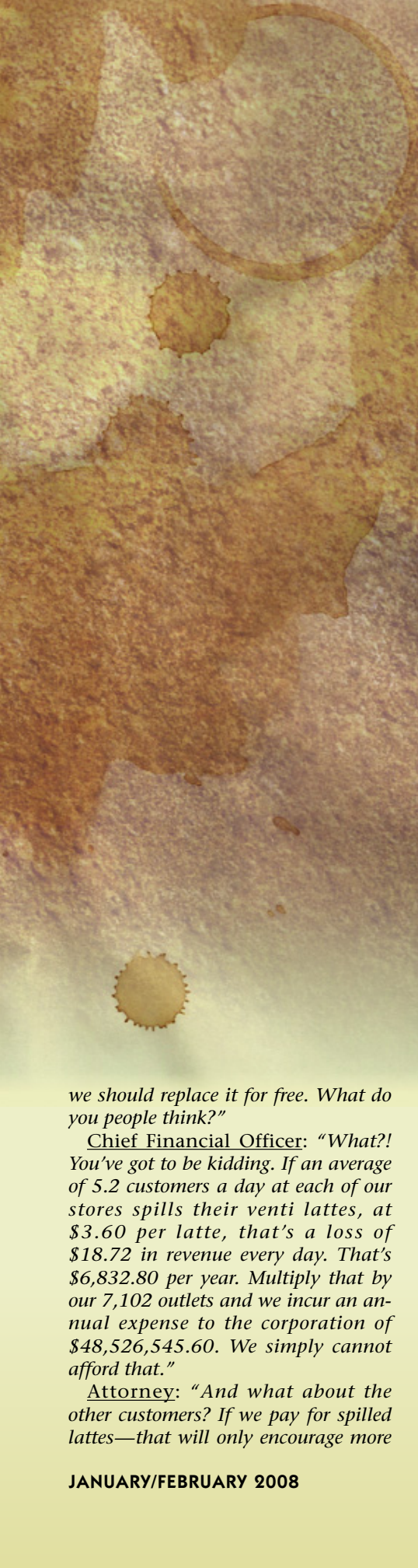
People on the patio turned and stared. I felt like an oaf. But the manager immediately popped out the door. "Don't worry," he said cheerfully. "I'll get something to clean that up," which he did while I skulked back inside to buy a replacement. After a couple of minutes, the manager met me inside. "I've already ordered you another latte," he said. "It's on us. These things happen."

"Why—thank you," I said. I did-

n't expect that. Suddenly I didn't feel like such an oaf. Kayte and I settled in, enjoyed our lattes and shared our muffins with the dogs. I managed not to have any more accidents.

Later I reflected on the incident. Replacing spilled lattes is a generous policy—but I wonder what happened in the meeting at Starbucks headquarters when they debated and decided on this policy. I think it may have gone something like this:

President: "Someone has suggested that when a customer spills a latte,



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people to spill their lattes. Not only will we be out more money, but people may scald themselves as they deliberately spill their coffee—or slip on the spilled coffee and sue us!”

Operations Director: *“That’s right. People will take advantage. We’ll have to post rules so they don’t take advantage. Maybe a sign that says, ‘Thank you for not spilling your latte.’ Otherwise it’ll just get out of control.”*

Okay, I’ve painted the Attorney, CFO and Operations Director as the bad guys, and I apologize. Yet that’s the way many people (especially people “in charge”) react to the idea of unconditional grace. It’s impractical. People will take advantage of it. It’ll get out of control.

Generosity is good to a point, but it has to have limits—and those limits usually take the form of more detailed and stricter rules and regulations. Yet seeing grace as impractical is not limited to the business world. Even in Christendom, God’s grace is often viewed with skepticism or fear. Grace has to be “balanced” by law, or there will be anarchy, some believe—complete, unconditional grace leads to permissiveness.

Yet that’s not what the New Testament tells us. “For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men. It teaches us to say ‘No’ to ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright and godly lives in this present age....” (Titus 2:11-12). It is not, in fact, law that leads people to self-control, uprightness and godliness. Law punishes people who do not exercise self-control—but it does not produce self-control. It is grace that does that.

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realized what God has known for all eternity—that generosity and mercy make people want to do the right thing. As far as Starbucks is concerned, “the right thing” is for us to come back to Starbucks and drink more coffee. As far as God is concerned, “the right thing” is for us to be more like him. To love our neighbor—to be just, upright, moral and generous—to extend grace, just like God.

These attitudes and behaviors can’t be brought about by making rules against not doing them. Rather, we are encouraged to live out these attitudes and behaviors by the perfect example God gave us in the person of Jesus.

Of course, as we know, since we humans are not capable of having the same attitude as Jesus Christ (Philippians 2:5), Jesus actually lives in us and produces these works himself. Our doing these works doesn’t save us. Rather, God has already saved us so he can lead us to do these works—by his grace.

So back to our meeting at Starbucks headquarters.

President: *“I appreciate your perspectives, yet every individual that we treat with kindness and respect will become a loyal customer. Loyal customers will bring in far more than the 50 million dollars you say this policy may cost us. Not only that, but we’ll have good will in the communities we serve!”*

Everyone in the meeting: *“Good thinking, Mr. President. Why didn’t we think of that? That’s why you make the big bucks! We’ll implement this brilliant new policy right away, sir!”*

Alright, maybe it didn’t happen exactly like that. But the bottom line is, we’re going back to Starbucks for raspberry lattes again. In moderation, of course, because we live self-controlled, upright and godly lives in this present age. □

we should replace it for free. What do you people think?”

Chief Financial Officer: *“What?! You’ve got to be kidding. If an average of 5.2 customers a day at each of our stores spills their venti lattes, at \$3.60 per latte, that’s a loss of \$18.72 in revenue every day. That’s \$6,832.80 per year. Multiply that by our 7,102 outlets and we incur an annual expense to the corporation of \$48,526,545.60. We simply cannot afford that.”*

Attorney: *“And what about the other customers? If we pay for spilled lattes—that will only encourage more*