



I have an Underwood typewriter on display in my home, a reminder of my childhood when I would play on this typewriter, pretending to type letters even before I knew how to spell, and later when I actually knew how to type words on the page. I used the hunt and peck method, searching for each letter as I typed, but when I was in high school, I took a typing class. I learned the placement of the letters on the keyboard and could type documents without looking at my fingers, which made typing term papers for school much easier!



At the end of each line on the manual typewriter, I would slide the carriage back to the beginning, allowing me to start a new line. When I received my first electric typewriter at graduation, I could hit the return key and the carriage would automatically slide back. I was so excited about this modern technology!



When I went to seminary, I purchased my first computer with word processing, which automatically wrapped the words to the next line when I came to the edge of the page. But it also could do something that the typewriter could not do—it offered right justification, a term meaning it could line up the characters on the right side of the page by adding extra

spaces between words. No more ragged edges. Now my typing looked like a professional typesetter.

I've always thought that was a strange word to refer to the straight edges of a margin—justification. It means to straighten up, to smooth out, to get rid of the ragged edges. When I read Paul's letter to the church in Rome, I wondered why he used the same word: "we are justified by faith." The word comes from the Greek δικαιοῶ (*dikaioō*), meaning to put right with, vindicate, to cause one to be in right relation with God.

During the Reformation in the 16th century, Martin Luther focused on this phrase and realized that it meant that God *regarded* us a righteous, saw us in a right relationship. It's through our faith, our trust in God, that we come into a right relationship. Although what we *do* is important, that's not what makes us right with God. Although what we *believe* is important, that's not what makes the relationship either. It's our faith, our trust, that connects us closer to God.

You have probably experienced that you're your own friends. You may *act* kindly to one another, and you may *believe* the person, but it's when you reach the point where you deeply trust that person that the relationship becomes even stronger. Trust may take a while to



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happen with our friends, but with God, Jesus has helped us form that deeper trust, creating a peace within us, showing us that God's grace and love fill our lives.

That all sounds nice, doesn't it? But then Paul stretched this relationship by saying that we can now boast in our afflictions, our times of suffering, for that leads to endurance, which produces character, which creates hope. That almost sounds like someone saying to us while we're suffering, "It's good for you. It makes you a better person." That's not something anyone wants to hear when facing a crisis in life, though in hindsight that's what many of us may later discover. We often become stronger individuals as we endure the struggles we face in life, but we may not find the idea comforting at the time.

Our suffering is like using a manual typewriter to a word processor. When we manually try to line up our ragged edges by ourselves, we can't do it. We may feel frustrated. No matter how much planning we may do on a manual typewriter, we can't make those typed edges smooth. But with God, smoothing out the edges is as easy as using a word processor: we are justified, our rough edges are all lined up. We're straightened out. Life is smoothed out.

All of us have rough and ragged edges in our lives, and many times we discover we can't straighten them out ourselves. But even in our ragged lives, something of beauty can sprout.

Someone recently was looking at the plants around my home, and she noticed a broken pot with flowers. She said, "Why did you use that broken pot? Couldn't you have gotten a new one instead? A new flowerpot would look much better than that broken one."

I replied, "I use that broken pot to remind me that even when our edges look ragged, something beautiful can still grow within us. Throughout my garden, I have intentionally used broken pots as a reminder that beauty surrounds us, even in our brokenness. God sees our ragged edges, but rather than seeing us as broken, God sees us as justified, as though our ragged edges have been made smooth. We may still have our ragged and broken edges, but God sees us as beautiful, as loved and accepted, even with our ragged edges. It's not that we *believe* our edges have been smoothed, or that our *actions* have smoothed out our edges. It's because God looking through our relationship with Jesus Christ sees us right justified, the rough and ragged places made smooth.



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In the midst of those ragged times of life, we can choose how to respond when we encounter others with ragged edges, as was the case with a woman who went to the post office

The United States Postal Service was changing its rates for first-class postage. The day before the change was to take effect, a long line of people wanted to buy first-class postage stamps at a small-town post office. The post office was running low on stamps because of the high demand and was selling only a limited supply to each person so as to help as many people as possible. This news of the post office's rationing was greeted with anger and frustration as the customers wanted to purchase more than the post office was willing to sell. The solitary postal clerk was taking verbal and emotional beatings one after another. She looked ragged from the ordeal and was about done in.



One of the customers was waiting patiently in line. When it was this customer's turn, she

purchased her allotted quota of stamps and decided to help the clerk out. She said in a loud voice for all in the line to hear, "What do you mean you're running out of stamps? After all, I've only known about this for three or four weeks. I have put it off and put it off, and now I come in here at the last minute with all the rest of these people and you tell me that you're running out of stamps! Well, I never!" She gave the postal clerk a big wink, paid for her stamps, and left. The postal clerk had brightened considerably, and [there was utter silence] among the people waiting in line.¹

When you encounter rough edges in life, remember that God has accepted all of your ragged edges. May you be inspired to accept the rough edges of others, trusting that we're all right justified by God.

¹ Hodgin, Michael. *1002 Humorous Illustrations for Public Speaking: Fresh, Timely, Compelling Illustrations for Preachers, Teachers, and Speakers*. Zondervan. Kindle Edition, #956.