

grace: LEADER INTRO

We live in a performance-based world. We can't escape it. Grades. Try-outs. Auditions. Performance reviews. **It's exhausting.**

Our culture glorifies busyness, improvement and being "the best of the best". From a young age, we're rewarded based on how we perform certain tasks. This isn't inherently a bad thing—we're all better off for being praised for learning to use the "big kid potty," and it feels good to be rewarded for a job well done!

But in a world that measures success, worthiness and purpose in terms of performance, *where does grace fit in?*

Where does grace fit in when I'm trying to get into a good college? Where does grace fit in when I'm trying to follow what I hear at church and be a "good" Christian? Where does grace fit in when I feel like I just can't do what's expected of me? Where does grace fit in when I fail?

The big deal about grace is that how God operates could not be more different from how our culture operates. A's, home runs, and choir solos don't make God love you more. Just like mess-ups, brokenness and sin don't make God love you less. He just loves you.

Accepting grace is **hard** to do. We tend to either fall toward believing that we will never be able to measure up to God's standards **or** toward thinking we've earned and deserve all that the Lord graciously gives to us. Both are inaccurate and both are dangerous ways of thinking.

Is it any wonder that our students struggle to accept a free gift when they're told time and time again that nothing is really free?

Leaders, share with your students how "getting" grace has changed you. Share what struggles you have had & currently have. Be open with your students, they need to learn how adults handle struggles in their faith, and they want to learn from you.

Grace is not something that just our students need to understand, it's likely something we're still trying to work out ourselves. Prepare yourself for this series by surrendering your desire to "out-good" God's grace. Let's collectively acknowledge that we're all broken sinners in need of Jesus and the grace He gladly and freely gives.

Prepare your own heart for this series by reading Ephesians 2:1-9.

Read verses 1-3 again. Recall where you were when you first encountered the risen Lord.

Read verses 4-7 again. Praise God for His great mercies.

Read verses 8 & 9 again. Pray that this would be the cry of your heart. Pray that your small group would come to love and understand these words for themselves. Remember that you are Christ's workmanship, that He chose and formed you for good.

Read Philippians 2:5-8. Remember what Christ suffered and gave on our behalf. Thank God for grace. Ask Him to remove any lingering pride about being a "good Christian". There is no room for pride at the foot of the cross. All is grace. Praise God!

grace: IS NOT PERFORMANCE

For this series, start each small group time by reading Ephesians 2:4-9.

PURPOSE:

- ◇ Compare & contrast grace & performance
- ◇ Demonstrate that the grace God gives to us is something we could never earn

LARGE GROUP IDEAS:

- ◇ **Video:** Clip from Matt Metzger's sermon from October 2, 2016 – 18:10 – 25:07
YouTube - Matt Chandler Sermon Jam – Goodness vs. The Cross
- ◇ **Sing:** *Amazing Grace, How He Loves*

CONNECT:

Let's create a space to be real about grace. Many Christians attest to accepting God, but taking a while to accept and "get" grace. If you can think of something, share your own experience of "getting grace". When did it become different to you?

Don't be afraid to follow where your students want the conversation about grace to go. This is important, and everyone comes to understand it a little differently.

- Talk about a time that you failed to do something that was asked of you. What were the circumstances of you not completing the task?
- How did you feel afterwards?
- What things in your life are directly tied to performance?
- In what areas do you most feel the pressure to perform well? Is it school? Relationships? Sports? Church?
- How can the pressure to perform consume your thoughts? E.g., chain reaction... If I don't get x, y won't happen. What's dangerous about this way of thinking?
- What is **grace**? (How is it different from mercy? Justice?)

UNDERSTAND:

Read **Galatians 2:15-3:11**

- What are "works of the law" referred to here?
- What do you know about Paul's background that makes this significant? [Paul was a devout Jew – he thought works of the Law were the most important aspect of his religion. After his conversion, he has a completely new view of "works".]
- **Read 3:3 again.** This seems a little harsh, doesn't it? Why is Paul so upset?
- Look again at **3:7-9**. What is this verse referring to?
- What does it mean to be "blessed with Abraham?" [We join in as heirs to God's covenant with Abraham because of **grace**. God calls us His people, and gives us His inheritance.]

Read **Philippians 3:3-11**

- What does Paul list here?
- What kind of people would find these things significant?
- **Verse 7** marks a shift. What is the change? Why does Paul no longer count the things he listed as significant?
- How does his throwing away the things that were his “performance” compel us to do the same?

LIVE:

- Is it easier for you to accept *grace* or *to be rewarded based on your performance*?
- Why do you think this is?
- What is the danger in thinking that we can earn God's favor and forgiveness with our actions? How could this take glory away from God?
- It is hard to understand grace in a graceless world, let alone live it out. Practically speaking, how can we live in this world and live like we are covered in the grace of God?
- So many of us live our lives by lists and "checking the boxes." If our relationship/standing with God is not based on our good works, what does it practically look like to have an ongoing relationship with God?
- Grace seems like a simple thing to accept; yet many Christians struggle to accept this gift. Why is it hard for so many of us to accept grace?
- If you can accept grace for yourself, can you also accept grace for everyone else?
- Read & respond to this passage from Rene Schlaepfer's "Grace Immersion":

"I guess you could say that's the hitch, if you've been looking for one, with grace: *You have to accept that others get it too.*

The very people you hate, the ones you loathe, the ones who drive too fast down your street, the ones whose loud parties annoy you at night, the ones who beg for money when you know it's a con, the ones who called you names in school, the ones who say they'll change but never do, the ones who hurt you so bad you still have scars, the ones whose politics you believe are leading the country to hell in a hand basket, the ones you disagree with on that litmus test issue, the ones who are ruining your city, the ones who let their dogs poop on your lawn, let their kids scream in church, let their impulses get out of control, cheated on you, lied to you, laughed at you, yelled at you, the ones who litter the beach, talk in movies, cut in line, the ones who flip you off, cut you off, hack you off—well if they simply receive it, they get grace too. Same as you.

...What if they don't deserve it? As Philip Yancy writes, 'In the realm of grace, the word *deserve* does not even apply.' *Can you live with that?*'

grace: IS SCANDALOUS

For this series, start each small group time by reading Ephesians 2:4-9.

PURPOSE:

- ◇ To show that God's grace is outrageous, scandalous and incredible.
- ◇ To see that grace is not just a New Testament characteristic of God. He has always shown grace.

LARGE GROUP IDEAS:

- ◇ **Video:** Watch // listen to Lauren Daigle's song *How Can It Be*
- ◇ **Sing:** *How Deep the Father's Love*

CONNECT:

- What do you think justice is? Where have you seen it? Where have you NOT seen it?
- Have you ever gotten what you deserved? Or not gotten what you deserved?
- Where are places that you have read about God's wrath in the Bible or heard stories of God's wrath?
- Do you think that God is involved with our daily lives? Does God "care" about what's going on in the world today?
- If you were stranded on a desert island, what three items would you want to have with you?

UNDERSTAND:

READ THIS: Why do we sometimes refer to God's grace as "scandalous"? What makes it so outrageous... so incredible? To understand scandalous grace, we need to first understand God's desire for righteousness. It's unyielding. Wrathful. He demands perfection and we can't supply that. Fortunately, God is (and always will be) a gracious God. Let's take a look at the story of Noah.

Noah and the Flood: Noah lived about 1,000 years after Adam and Eve. **Read these sections of the story:**

State of the world: **Genesis 6:5-8**

1. How does this sound different similar to the world right now?
2. What does "the LORD regretted that he had made human beings" mean?
3. How did Noah find favor in the eyes of the LORD? (*hint: verse 9*)

Commands for Noah: **Genesis 6:9-14, 22**

The Flood: **Genesis 7:1-12, 24**

1. What do you think it would have been like to obey God's commands? What might have other people thought about Noah?
2. How can a loving God destroy the entire earth?

3. How can you see God's love in this story?
4. Why did God destroy the world?

The Covenant – post Flood: **Genesis 9:8-16**

1. What was God's covenant?
2. What characteristics of God do you see in this passage?

The key things for us to understand is:

1. God created the world.
2. Humans screwed it up.
3. But, God is still gracious... and he gave us a second chance.
4. This happened over and over and over (and continues to happen still).
5. But God is always gracious. He continued to forgive in the Old Testament and the gospel story shows us the perfect example of grace: the highlight of biblical grace. ***This is the "scandalous" part of scandalous grace... that we are continuously rebelling against a perfect God, yet his gracious nature is always there and always will be.***

Post reading question:

- What does the story of Noah show us about the nature of God's grace?

LIVE:

- How does having a just God affect our lives?
- If we viewed grace as something that is scandalous, what would that do to our view of God? To our faith journey?
- Are there areas of our lives where we are rebelling against God?
- Do you ever use grace as an excuse for rebellion?
- Do you ever feel like God is waiting to punish you for the things you've done? What would a gracious God's response be to this?
- How do you see these two characteristics of God (just and gracious) in yourself as an image bearer of God?

grace: IS NOT AN EXCUSE

For this series, start each small group time by reading Ephesians 2:4-9.

PURPOSE:

- ◇ To show that God's grace is outrageous, scandalous and incredible.
- ◇ To see that grace is not just a New Testament characteristic of God. He has always shown grace.

LARGE GROUP IDEAS:

- ◇ **Video:** Falling Plates - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=08peJK0m510>
Gospel spoken word - <https://youtu.be/K48-Li7llfA>
Bride: More than a metaphor - Jon Jorgenson - <https://youtu.be/7suRLmaBacQ>

CONNECT:

- What is the best gift you have ever received?
- What does it mean to be ungrateful?
- What are you ungrateful for?
- Have you ever received a gift that you were not grateful for?

UNDERSTAND:

Quickly use a question or two to recap the last two weeks...

- What is grace?
- How are we saved by grace and not our works?
- What is the difference between grace, justice and mercy?

Read **Romans 5:20 – 6:23 in NLT translation** (backside)

- What does it mean to be a slave to sin or ruled by sin?
- Does receiving grace mean you no longer sin? Then what effect does grace have?
- How does this passage help you understand the role of the heart in receiving grace?
- Is there a limit to God's grace? (Romans 5:20-21)

LIVE:

- ◇ *Share a story of how God's grace has transformed your life or the life of someone you know.*
- ◇ *Have more time? Share the Gospel with all of your students.*

- If we are always going to be forgiven, why should we worry about sin? What does it matter?
- What is the risk on God's side in offering grace to us? Is God willing to take that risk?
- How does a person accept and receive God's grace?
- What would it look like to abuse or take advantage of God's grace?

Romans 5:20 – 6:23 (New Living Translation)

²⁰God's law was given so that all people could see how sinful they were. But as people sinned more and more, God's wonderful grace became more abundant. ²¹So just as sin ruled over all people and brought them to death, now God's wonderful grace rules instead, giving us right standing with God and resulting in eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Sin's Power Is Broken

¹Well then, should we keep on sinning so that God can show us more and more of his wonderful grace? ²Of course not! Since we have died to sin, how can we continue to live in it? ³Or have you forgotten that when we were joined with Christ Jesus in baptism, we joined him in his death? ⁴For we died and were buried with Christ by baptism. And just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glorious power of the Father, now we also may live new lives.

⁵Since we have been united with him in his death, we will also be raised to life as he was. ⁶We know that our old sinful selves were crucified with Christ so that sin might lose its power in our lives. We are no longer slaves to sin. ⁷For when we died with Christ we were set free from the power of sin. ⁸And since we died with Christ, we know we will also live with him. ⁹We are sure of this because Christ was raised from the dead, and he will never die again. Death no longer has any power over him. ¹⁰When he died, he died once to break the power of sin. But now that he lives, he lives for the glory of God. ¹¹So you also should consider yourselves to be dead to the power of sin and alive to God through Christ Jesus.

¹²Do not let sin control the way you live; do not give in to sinful desires. ¹³Do not let any part of your body become an instrument of evil to serve sin. Instead, give yourselves completely to God, for you were dead, but now you have new life. So use your whole body as an instrument to do what is right for the glory of God. ¹⁴Sin is no longer your master, for you no longer live under the requirements of the law. Instead, you live under the freedom of God's grace.

¹⁵Well then, since God's grace has set us free from the law, does that mean we can go on sinning? Of course not! ¹⁶Don't you realize that you become the slave of whatever you choose to obey? You can be a slave to sin, which leads to death, or you can choose to obey God, which leads to righteous living. ¹⁷Thank God! Once you were slaves of sin, but now you wholeheartedly obey this teaching we have given you. ¹⁸Now you are free from your slavery to sin, and you have become slaves to righteous living.

¹⁹Because of the weakness of your human nature, I am using the illustration of slavery to help you understand all this. Previously, you let yourselves be slaves to impurity and lawlessness, which led ever deeper into sin. Now you must give yourselves to be slaves to righteous living so that you will become holy.

²⁰When you were slaves to sin, you were free from the obligation to do right. ²¹And what was the result? You are now ashamed of the things you used to do, things that end in eternal doom. ²²But now you are free from the power of sin and have become slaves of God. Now you do those things that lead to holiness and result in eternal life. ²³For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life through Christ Jesus our Lord.