

Grace

Chapter Summary

Weekly Win

The win is for participants to understand the biblical definition of grace and how that impacts the Christian life, both initially and forever.

Bottom Lines

- People often relate to God on a performance basis.
- With God, grace is the rule, not the exception.
- One hundred percent of the "to dos" in Christian faith are responses to what God has "to done" for us.

Before the Meeting

Pray

Continue to pray for your group members individually. Pray they will recognize God's undeserved gift of grace that is not based on performance. Also pray for their response to the *Grace* film if you choose to show it.

Communicate with Co-leader(s)

As leaders, you should address the following items:

- Evaluate the fifth meeting with your co-leaders soon after it's over.
- Decide who will be facilitating which parts of the discussion for the next week. Be sure to discuss time frames for each section given the additional time needed to watch the *Grace* film.
- Clarify which leader will follow up with any group members who you feel need individual attention.
- Ask yourselves, "Are group members experiencing a *conversational* environment where they can explore faith and experience community?"

Contact Group Members

Contact your group members individually by email, phone, text, or a note. Meet with them outside of group if you haven't yet. Remind them to be thinking about what grace means to them personally.

We've created this [email template](#) to use as you contact your group members each week. We recommend sending an email a few days before your group to serve as a reminder.

PREPARE THE ENVIRONMENT

Prepare a welcoming environment for the group members by being available before and after group.

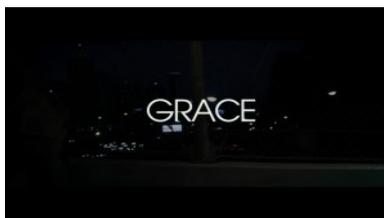
SHARING STORIES

Given the nature of this week's content, along with the *Grace* film, please don't have anyone share his or her stories this week. You will need the time for discussion.

WATCH THE GRACE FILM

Your group can watch the 13-minute *Grace* film during your group time.

Please watch it in advance so you are prepared for your group's discussion.



As leaders, you are free to position the *Grace* film at whatever point you feel is best for your group. Our recommendation is to play it after Section Two which will allow the group to have an opening discussion about the idea of grace as well as an introduction to the biblical idea. Positioning the film after the second discussion will create a powerful, emotional, and visual example to drive home the concepts discussed in the first two sections. Plan on being flexible with the discussion, basing it on how the group members respond to the film.

Discussion | Section One

System Failure

Section Win

The win is that participants have an opportunity to discuss how they are affected by the world of performance and any moments where they experienced exceptions to that system.

Section Summary

We live in a world driven by a performance based thinking. That thinking often shapes our assumptions about God. If there is a God, and if that God had a hand in creating the world, shouldn't we believe he is a performance -based God? There are moments we witness experiences that are the opposite of this system, moments of mercy and grace. What might those moments tell us about God?

Expanded Leader Notes

Questions for Reflection

- Where do you feel the effects of a performance-based world most?
- How does this influence your view of God?
- When is a time that you have been let "off the hook"? How did you feel about it?

Leading the Discussion

Question 1: This question creates an opportunity for participants to share personal experiences that connect with the pressure to perform.

Question 2: This discussion will hopefully surface if group members consider God to be performance-based. Many people have assumed that God judges and accepts based on performance. Be listening to their responses as it will guide your discussion about grace.

Question 3: When we experience moments of mercy and grace we often feel a strong desire to be indebted to the other party. There is something in most of us that wants to find a way to pay someone back. The importance of this conversation is that it helps set the stage that our personal pride, wanting to earn God's forgiveness instead of receive it, could be a barrier to reconciliation with God. This may be a conversation you reference in later discussions.

Discussion | Section Two

Undeserved Favor

Section Win

The win is that participants understand that grace is the undeserved favor of God that should produce an ongoing sense of gratitude.

Section Summary

Many Christians are so programmed by performance that they often begin a relationship with God in faith that is then managed by performance. Most religious systems encourage a bargaining mentality that assumes we have some leverage with God. The Apostle Paul reminded the first Christians that a relationship with God is both started and lived in grace. When properly understood, a Christian should live with a perpetual sense of gratitude.

Expanded Leader Notes

Questions for Reflection

- Is the idea of a relationship with God absent of performance a new idea to you? Explain.
- How do bargaining-based Christianity and grace-based Christianity look different?
- How would you explain the grace of God to someone else?

Leading the Discussion

Question 1: This discussion gives participants who grew up within a performance-based faith system a chance to contrast their experience with this teaching on grace. Facilitators who have similar experiences should be prepared to share.

Question 2: Bargaining-based Christianity is motivated by guilt or obligation in order to receive approval or get God to behave in a desired way. Grace-based Christianity is motivated by gratitude, knowing that approval has already been given. You may want to talk about how two people can act in obedience towards God in identical ways on the outside but experience those actions very differently based on their motives.

Question 3: This question gives participants the opportunity to articulate the definition of grace. Be prepared to gently bring clarity when needed.

Grace Film Discussion Options

We recommend showing the *Grace* film at this point in the conversation. See link to film above in the **Before the Meeting** section.

Option 1 with Story Cards:

Before showing the *Grace* film, spread the Story Cards on a table and ask group members to choose an image that represents *grace* to them. You can do this at the beginning of the group or right before showing the film. Have group members hang onto their cards until after the film.

Introduce the film by telling the group this film is a visual picture of the idea of grace. Show the film.

After the film, ask group members to share what grace means to them by reflecting on both their cards and the film. Let them know that their understanding of grace may have changed because of the film and that's okay. The idea of using an image in the discussion can help group

members transition from the film to a helpful discussion. Be aware that some group members may get caught up in emotions from the film instead of focusing on what grace actually means.

Option 2:

Introduce the film by telling the group that this film is a visual picture of the idea of grace. Encourage them to look for parallels as they watch the film. After you have viewed the film, you may want to ask some of these potential questions:

- Which character(s) in the film do you identify with most? Why?
- How different is that picture from others you have had of God?
- If the film we just watched is meant to be a picture of how God feels about us, what does that tell us about God?
- How do you think God feels about you?

Additional Scripture

You can read the parable of the lost son together (Luke 15:11–31); help your group see the connection between this biblical passage and the film. At this point, you may also want to share one of Andy's observations from the message: "God could not love you more, and nothing you do will make God love you less."

Discussion | Section Three

The Reason for Obedience

Section Win

The win is for participants to understand that grace should motivate Christian behavior that is consistent with what God's love and forgiveness modeled for them.

Section Summary

When grace is properly understood, it should motivate Christians to extend love, forgiveness, obedience, and more because they were loved first by God.

Expanded Leader Notes

Questions for Reflection

- What has characterized your exposure to or experience with Christians? Why do you

think that is?

- What should a Christian characterized by love and motivated by gratitude look like?
- How would your life change if you viewed obedience to God's rules as opportunities to express gratitude?

Leading the Discussion

Question 1: Many (not all) participants have had negative experiences with churches or Christians who did not love, forgive or accept the way a response to grace should have produced. This gives participants an opportunity to share their bad church/ bad Christian experiences. This is a golden opportunity for facilitators to model a different way. You may feel compelled to apologize for (often well meaning) ministries or people you have never met.

Question 2: Ideally, Christians should be the most loving, forgiving, gracious and helpful members of society. However, even Christians, who should know better, need to be regularly reminded of what they have been forgiven for. Being a Christian does not cure you of bad behavior (sin); it frees you from the penalty. This is an opportunity for facilitators to share from their own authentic Christian experience. Participants are drawn to Christians who can honestly admit that obedience is an ongoing learning process.

Question 3: Rules that are burdens when seeking approval feel very different when motivated by gratitude. Through this discussion, try to help participants express or imagine this. Who are the people in our lives would we be more compelled to forgive if we focused on what we have been forgiven? Who are the people in our lives that are difficult to love who we would be more freed up to love?

Wrap-Up

Review Bottom Lines

- People often relate to God on a performance basis.
- With God, grace is the rule, not the exception.
- One hundred percent of the “to dos” in Christian faith are responses to what God has “to done” for us.

Resource Reminder and Preparation for Next Week

Remind the group of the additional resources on the website. Also, they are to answer the Chapter 7 questions in the Conversation Guide and listen to the message for Chapter 7: “Faith.”

Stories

If you still have group members who have not shared their story, ask for volunteers to share in your next group meeting. Remind them that resources are available on the website to help them prepare their stories if needed.

Pray

As you close in prayer, thank God that you don't have to earn his love, but that he freely gives it.