

Way of Discipleship Small Groups

Living in God's grace



Touching base (5 minutes)

Open in prayer as is helpful for your group.

If this is your first session take time to introduce yourselves and set any ground rules you want to for your time together.

If you met previously take the opportunity either as a group or in pairs to check in with each other about how your response from last time has gone.



Opening question(s) (5 minutes)

When have you received unconditional love? How did it make you feel? Did you find it easy to receive? Why?



Understanding the information (15 minutes)

Share these thoughts in your own words or read them together:

Living in God's grace is so essential. It is easy for our "putting God's teaching into practice" to slip into duty or legalism. This can crush our spirits, make us bitter and judging of others, and as we shall see, fail to transform the heart.

This is why Jesus criticised the Pharisees – not for their lack of obedience, but for their legalism. This is the message of the elder brother in the parable of the Prodigal Son, who becomes embittered, and ends up serving his father, not out of love, but out of duty.

But the motive for being a disciple can only be because we are loved, forgiven and accepted by God, even before we think about obeying Him. "We love, because He first loved us."

Scripture calls this undeserved, unconditional love grace. The Bible says that, above all, God is love. His grace is the quality of love God has for us, and that Jesus' life and death demonstrated. It gives complete and utter worth to anyone, regardless of who they are or how they live. The starting place for obeying God can only be this: the more we grow in receiving His grace, the more we will want to pay attention and obey.

Responding to God in obedience is therefore effort, but it is never earning. We are already loved, whether we obey or not. As Paul writes, "For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God— not by works, so that no one can boast." (Ephesians 2:8-9)



Grace can be hard for us to accept. We live in a world of conditionality and are trained from childhood that good behaviour leads to reward, while bad behaviour leads to punishment. We can therefore easily slip into experiencing discipleship as religiously trying to build a bridge to God (which is perhaps a little arrogant!). The reality of grace however is that God has, through Christ, built a bridge to us.

Christ was clear that it is only those who know they need to receive God's grace that will truly turn to Him: "It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. But go and learn what this means: 'I desire mercy, not sacrifice.' For I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners." (Luke 5:12-13) Author Brennan Manning calls this the "revelation bright as the evening star: Jesus comes for sinners, for those as outcast as tax collectors and for those caught up in squalid choices and failed dreams. He comes for corporate executives, street people, superstars, farmers, addicts, and even used car salesmen..." In a reflection on the parable of the Prodigal Son, the parable which demonstrates God's unconditional love like nothing else, Rob Parsons says that the message of the story is that you can always come home. Whatever you have done, whoever you are, "There will be a Father waiting, and there will always be a light on."

It's worth repeating that in daily discipleship, one of the best reasons for responding to God is not to gain an identity but because He has already given us an identity. In fact, while the world of consumerism might try and seduce us into building our own identity through what we own, Christians believe that it is only God who can truly tell us who we are. It's only by receiving this identity that we will truly change - the more we realize how God sees us, the more we will want to obey Him and to become our true selves. One writer puts it like this, "We are never free until we submit our hearts and minds in obedience to Christ, and we are never so much our true selves as when becoming more like Him."

Discuss: What might help me receive God's grace? What gets in the way?

Reading the Bible (15 minutes)

Read Luke 15: 11-24 in which Jesus gives us the most beautiful picture of God's grace.

Discuss the Discovery Bible Study questions:
What does this passage teach me about God?
What does this passage teach me about people?
How does this passage call me to obey God?
What might I do in response to this this week?

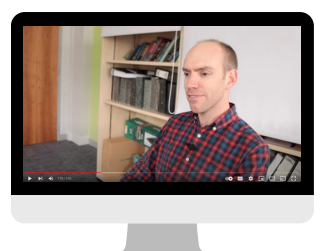


Seeing how it looks in real lives (10 minutes)

Watch the video at:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0qgP4S85AwQ&t=3s>

What struck you as important in the video?



Responding to God's leading (5 minutes)

Give people an opportunity to think about, "What might God be showing me and how might I respond?" They may like to write this down and/or share it with the group and/or share it with one other person. A friendly question is to ask each other, "Is there anything that would be helpful to ask you next time?"



Group prayer (5 minutes)

Adapted from Ephesians 1)

Praise be you our God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.
You have blessed me in the heavenly realms
with every spiritual blessing in Christ.
You chose me in him
before the creation of the world
to be holy and blameless in his sight.
In love you predestined me for adoption through Jesus Christ,
in accordance with Your pleasure and will
to the praise of Your glorious grace,
which You have freely given me in the One he loves.
In him I have redemption through his blood,
the forgiveness of sins,
in accordance with the riches of Your grace
that You lavished on us.
Amen.





Living in God's grace

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