



What's grace got to do with it?

Highlights

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Tina Turner, in one of her hit songs, asks, “What’s love got to do with it?” In relation to our faith, the answer is, everything. Central to the teachings of the church, is the understanding of grace. Yet, how many young people could tell you what that word means and more importantly, how it impacts their daily lives. Understanding what grace is and how it is that we live it, could be the most transforming teaching we do with youth and for the church as a whole. For years, confirmands have been taught that the definition of grace is: *God’s Redemption At Christ’s Expense*

While there is some helpful truth in this, it doesn’t convey the active and alive nature of grace. What if grace were a verb, instead of a noun? What if that single word could be understood in terms of not only who we are, but also how we journey as Christians? A deeper understanding of the power and the privilege of walking, living and extending the gift of grace every minute of every day can change the way we, and the youth we work with, journey in our faith.

Grace is something that you cannot “get”

In a culture where everything and anything has a price, this can be difficult for youth to understand. Grace is a free gift with no strings attached. It is not imparted in varying degrees to those who are most worthy. It is given in the same measure to all, equally. God loves us so much that he wants to be in relationship with us. So much so, that God sent his only Son, to live, love, laugh, and cry with us, and to suffer death on the cross so that we could be reconciled to God. God wanted us to know that he understands the messes we can sometimes get ourselves into and both the joy and pain of living. Through Jesus’

death and resurrection, we have the gift of God's grace. God created us, understands all the parts of us, and forgives us unconditionally. We can never fall beyond the love and grace of God. (see [Ephesians 2:1-10](#))

Grace is something that is “given”

If we can convey an understanding of the unconditional nature of God's grace, we can begin to examine with youth how that awesome love changes or transforms our lives each day. The grace of God means, “Here's your life!” Your life is, because God is. We are created in God's image and God's plan would not be complete without you and me. A helpful way to begin thinking of grace as “gift” is to ask youth to think about what is the best gift they have ever received, and then challenging them to think about what they did with that gift. When given a gift we really want, we are thankful and excited to enjoy what we've received. What single gift could be bigger than unconditional love and the promise of living forever? Grace is truly the most valuable gift that could be given to anyone at any time. The question then is how will we respond to that gift of grace? How can our lives be a reflection of that gift? Where do we begin?

Grace is the way we “journey”

Grace can mean here is your world—good and bad, happy and sad. Horrible things can and will happen, but God is with us through it all, helping us along the way so that we do not have to be afraid or without hope. There is an old saying, “What you are is God's gift to you; what you make of your life is your gift to God.” We are grace in the world, literally and figuratively. What would happen if we challenged youth and ourselves to walk, live, and extend grace every minute of every day? How would the world be impacted if we began to live grace by:

- Loving ALL people, without condition (there would be no loneliness).
- Forgiving ALL for how they may hurt us (there would be no violence or anger).
- Accepting ALL people as unique creations of God's plan (there would be no racism or hate in the world).
- Serving ALL people according to their needs (there would be no poverty or people starving; all people would have a place to call “home”).

Throwing this concept out to your youth will illicit yet more ideas. Indeed, the world would be radically changed if we could help young people understand and “do” grace in their schools, at home, at church, and in the world.

We are a ‘grace-driven’ people

Because of the gift of grace, we can experience true freedom. God does not ask of us perfection, only that we love God and love others in that same way. Perfect grace is given

because of our imperfections. We are in need daily of God's love and forgiveness, and it's provided daily. This flies in the face of the belief that, if we work hard enough or are good enough, we will get to heaven. The truth is, we will never be able to be "good enough" or climb the ladder high enough to deserve God's love and forgiveness in our lives. Instead, grace challenges us to be transformed daily in the light of God's love for us, and through that transformation, respond to others with that same love. We are "grace-driven" people when we can put aside our doubts that God could truly love us so perfectly that nothing we can do will separate us from God's love. We are free then, to experience all of the blessings of life on earth, knowing that God is with us every step of the way. (see [Romans 8:31-39](#))

"What's love got to do with it?" In a word, everything! Everything we are or ever will be, all the blessings of living are because of God's grace. In this way we look at the world in a different way. In youth ministry we can draw attention to and make connections with both the simplest or most amazing blessings experienced in daily life. Tears are grace. The forgiving look between people is grace. The smell of rain is grace. The lonesome cry of a loon is grace. The smile on a child's face is grace. A pizza shared between youth is grace. The way we are loved by others is grace. We are assured of God's all-encompassing love through the "grace of God, which passes all understanding," and "keeps our hearts and minds in Christ Jesus."

Resources

- [Essential Questions about Christianity and Lutheranism](#) (ELCA Web site)
- Buechner, Frederick. *Telling Secrets: A Memoir*. New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 1991. (And other books by Buechner.)
- Erlander, Daniel. *It's All About Love: The Christian Journey*. [Augsburg Fortress](#), 2000.
- Erlander, Daniel. *Manna and Mercy: A Brief History of God's Unfolding History to Mend the Entire Universe*. [Augsburg Fortress](#), 1995.
- *The Lutheran Handbook*. (humorous approach to learning about Lutheran theology) [Augsburg Fortress](#), 2005.
- *Lutheran Basics*. [Augsburg Fortress](#), 1999.

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