

GRACE

Changes

EVERYTHING



STUDIES



STUDIES

GRACE CHANGES EVERYTHING

Understanding the grace that God has shown towards us reshapes everything about our lives.

GRACE AND GOD

Grace changes the context in which God relates to us.

GRACE AND CHANGE

Grace changes people from the inside out, not the outside in.

GRACE AND EVANGELISM

Grace is infectious.

GRACE AND COMMUNITY

God's grace changes the way we see ourselves in relation to other Christians.

GRACE AND SOCIAL JUSTICE

God's grace changes the way we view ourselves in relation to those around us.

GRACE AND STEWARDSHIP

Grace changes the way we use what we've been given.

04

06

08

10

12

14

16

THE YEAR AHEAD

MARK 11-16

Leading up to Easter, Mitch will take us through the last section of Mark, through to the crucifixion and resurrection.

LETTERS IN REVELATION

Jayesh is going to spend 3 weeks looking at the letters to the churches in Revelation 2 & 3.

SONG OF SONGS

Derek will open up the book of looooooove.

JAMES

Faith without deeds is dead. So we're going to learn what it looks like from James to be alive in Christ.

A DEON SPECIAL

A serve of great bible teaching with a side of Deon. Would you like fries with that?

1 PETER

Leading into Christmas, we'll look at being God's people in a world that's not that fond of Christians.

APR

MAY

JUN

AUG

OCT

NOV



We want our groups to be places where we work out what it looks like to be in a relationship with God, and pray for each other as we try to share Jesus with those around us. Here's two ways we're going to do that in 2014.

TRANSFORMING GRACE

LIVING CONFIDENTLY IN GOD'S
UNFAILING LOVE

JERRY BRIDGES

NAVPRESS

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Paul the Apostle had this to say when talking about his work and the Gospel:

"For Christ's love compels us, because we are convinced that one died for all, and therefore all died." (2 Cor 5:14)

God's love for him shown in Jesus shaped and directed his life. He felt compelled to pour out his life so that others might know the same good God that he'd come to know. And so he prayed, spoke and lived in such a way that people would have the best chance of hearing & seeing the message of the Gospel.

The Gospel isn't academic. And we don't want to be a community that sees it as merely academic. We want those around us who don't know Jesus to come to know him. And we want to be sensitive, wise & loving in the way we give them opportunities to hear the Gospel. But the place it's got to start is with prayer.

So each week we meet as a group we're going to pray for each other and the friends that we're hoping to share the Gospel with. On the first night, consider who you're going to pray for this year. If you want, you can write them below.



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Freedom & confidence before God have never been found in what we do. Not before we knew Him and not after we came to know Him. Freedom & Confidence have always been found in one thing - God's Grace.

This year we're going to try and read 4 Christian books. The first book we're going to try and read together is a brilliant book written a while ago by Jerry Bridges called Transforming Grace.

So maybe in your growth group you can set aside 10 minutes a week to talk about what you're reading, over a meal or just during the week. But whatever you choose to do, grab it today. It's a great book, and it's only \$8.90 on Amazon!

COMMUNITY & MISSION

For the first night, we're going to spend some time getting to know each other, sharing our stories, and talking about what the group is going to look like.



Here's what we're going to do first - share our stories. Chances are there are people in the group who you don't know very well, so as a starting point, we're going to talk about where we're at with God. Here's what would be good to share:

What your background with God is.

How you became a Christian OR where you're at with God.

What's been the most helpful thing in helping you grow in your understanding of Him.

It doesn't have to be dramatic, impressive or even a finished story - I hope it isn't. It just has to be honest. Share as much or as little as you like, but for the group to work as it's meant to, we need to be sharing at least something about where we're at so we can help each other along.

So going round the group, just spend 3-4 minutes telling people a bit about yourself.



There's three aims for our Growth Groups. We want (1) to keep pushing each other in our relationship with God, (2) practically & prayerfully care for one another, and (3) keep praying for and encouraging each other to share Jesus with those around us who don't yet know him.

Experience shows that people get as much out of the group as the group puts in. So it might be worth stopping now to discuss what some helpful ways in which the group can achieve the above goals are. Can you eat together? How can you care for & look out for the group - mid-week & Sundays?

So just take a while now to stop and agree on some expectations for the group.

GRACE CHANGES EVERYTHING

Tonight the passage we're going to look at is Ephesians 2:1-10. Read it together.

1. KNOWING IT

Define Grace.

What's the relationship between understanding where we were (or are) according to the Bible, and what God is offering in Jesus?

How does this passage describe the relationship between grace, faith & good works?

3. DOING IT

If you were to explain Grace to someone who had never heard the Gospel, how would you do it?

Have you ever tried to explain grace to someone? How'd it go?

In your experience, do people associate grace with the Christian Gospel?

Stuff to pray for from the above...

Share about two friends / colleagues / family members that aren't Christians that you can pray for this year.

2. APPLYING IT

Watch this video from Francis Chan:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uLr9mwfCqSg>

What are some of the aspects of Grace you find hard to understand?

Discuss some of the implications for not understanding Grace as the Bible describes it?

Discuss the implications of really grasping grace.

4. SHARING IT

How would you talk to those around you in such a way that they could see your relationship with God was defined by Grace?

Discuss how this week you could share the concept of Grace with someone you know in a way that doesn't make you want to cringe.

GRACE & GOD'S WORD

Tonight we're going to be looking at how Grace affects our relationship with God, and therefore how we receive His Word. Because the challenge in most situations in life isn't that we don't know what God wants for us, but that we want something other than God.



As you've been reflecting on the idea of grace over the last week, is there anything that's struck you or that you've been reminded of that you can share with the group?

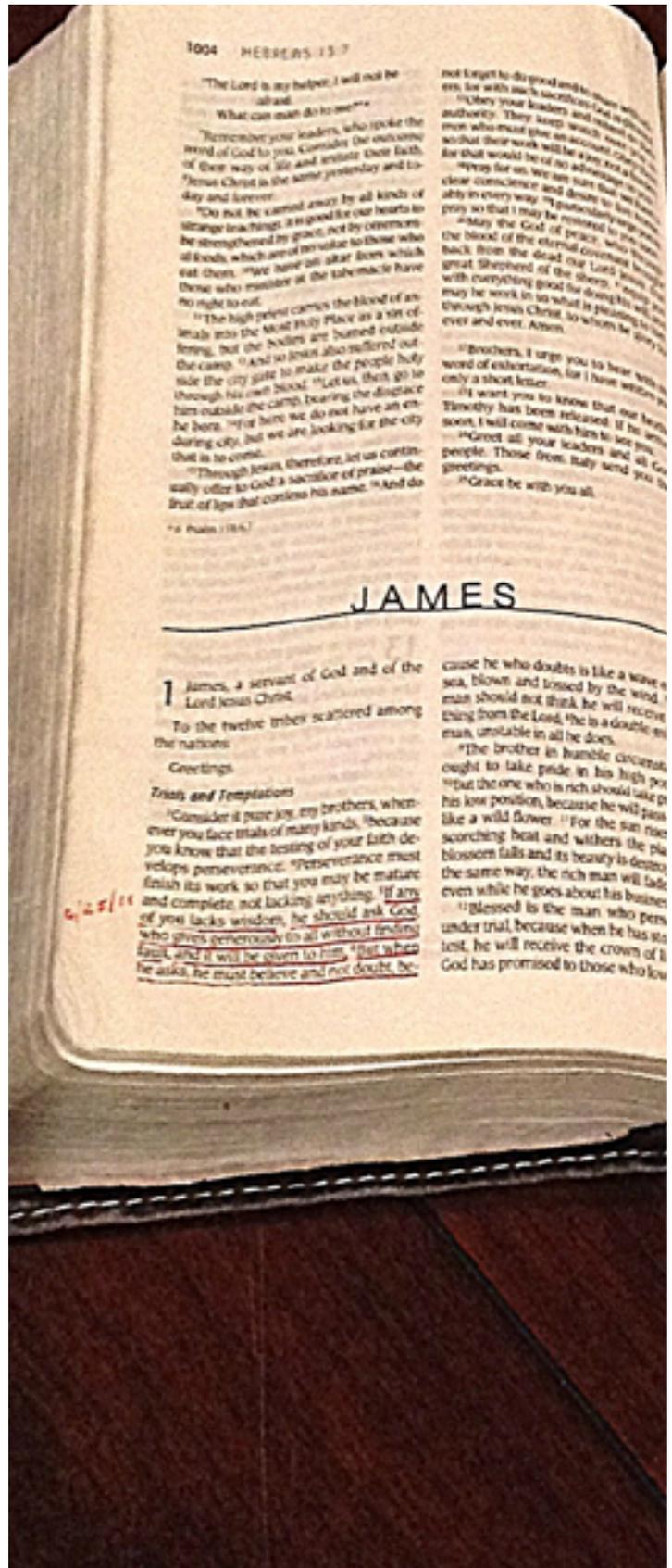
As Christians, we want to say that God speaks. His clearest expression is in Jesus (John 1; Hebrews 1:1-4) whom we meet in His written Word, the Bible (Luke 24:44-47; Timothy 3:16-17; 2 Peter 1:20-21).

The challenge is that some of what we read - even if we just restrict it to the teachings of Jesus - is counter-cultural and unpopular. This week we want to explore how grace changes our understanding of God's words to us - even the hard bits - and what that means for life now.

What are the things you think God calls on you to do that you find go against the grain? How do you deal with / work through those things?

As you speak to others about Christianity, what are the points at which they find Christianity difficult, irrelevant or just plain confusing?

Some things that God calls us to do come easily. Some not so. But underlying our approach to either of those is how we understand the relationship that the things God is calling us to is based on.



Read Galatians 3:26-4:7. In Galatians, Paul is arguing to his readers that there has been a monumental shift in their stance before him. What defines them now is not their Jewish-ness, nor even their obedience, but something completely independent and outside of them - Jesus.

1. KNOWING IT

In this section Paul goes one step further than saying that the Galatians are right with God. What's the "status" change of those who have faith in Jesus? (4:7 is a good summary, but the whole passage explores it.)

Paul describes how a status change before God also changes how we relate to God. Looking at 4:5-6, what's the change in how God speaks / works in & through those who have faith in Jesus? (Particularly look at 4:5-6)

3. DOING IT

Behind the struggle for many Christians to live the way God is calling them to live, is the question of whether God knows what is best for them AND whether He has their best in mind. What areas of your life do you struggle to believe that both of those things are true? Why?

How does grace help us move towards a position of trust, reliance and obedience?

2. APPLYING IT

In this passage, Paul mentions a number of status', particularly the move from slave to son. It might feel sexist, but he's drawing on the idea of the first-born son inheriting all, which is why he also calls those with faith in Jesus "heirs" - so it's not so much about gender, but the privileges associated with first-born males in that culture.

What's worth considering is the difference in relationship between a slave & his master, and the first-born son and his father. Discuss what the differences might be.

How does having God as a Father who saves, loves & promises so much so freely change the way we respond when He calls us to do things which go counter to what we might want/think?

4. SHARING IT

There are parts of the Bible that are uncomfortable. No two ways of getting around it. How do we speak to other people about these parts in light of a Gospel of Grace with God as a loving Father?

If you were to explain why you take what God says over and above what our culture might say, what would it look like?

Grappling with what God is calling you to is hard. It can go against the grain, yet when we grasp that we have a God who loves us, who has adopted us, and who is working towards our good even when we can't see or understand it - it gives a different perspective to the hard things.

When you pray for each other tonight, pray that you'd see God not as a distant, remote being, but as a loving, gracious father. Pray as well that we'd learn to speak to others about God as our father, not merely a law-maker.

GRACE & CHANGE

Sanctification is a word used to describe the change that God brings about in His people, through His Spirit, after they become Christians. Not in just some Christians, but all. It's going to look different in each and every one of us...but we should expect God to work, because He said He will. That's what we'll be talking about tonight.

W

e've been looking at how, for Christians, an understanding of God's grace changes every aspect of our lives. Last week we saw that grace changes how we relate to God. We saw that the grace God shows us helps us know God as our Father whose love for us is inexhaustible. It shows us He cares deeply about us and our ultimate good. When we might be tempted to think of God as a cold, distant God who only feels a sense of bitter disappointment towards us, grace reminds us that God is so devoted to us that He gladly suffered in a horrendous way to save us and bring us back to Him. He treasures us.

Has anything changed in how you see God since last week? Have you had any thoughts on how you relate to him?



This week, we're looking at what impact grace has in how we live our lives as Christians. We'll see that God's grace doesn't just bring us Salvation, and then it stops—God's grace continues working in us by changing us from the inside out and growing us into people who live lives that please Him.

The Ten Commandments are probably the most well known of the Judeo-Christian commands. How many of them can you name?

Would you describe the Ten Commandments as motivational and effective in helping people know how to live, and in shaping their lives? What do they do?

Most of us would agree that God calls his people to live pure lives and do good works. But some people might have very different reasons for trying to obey God in this. We're going to see what reason Paul gave to his student, Titus, who was teaching the churches on the island of Crete.

Read Titus 2:11–14. In Paul’s letter to Titus, Paul instructs him to teach the churches under his care to live their lives in such ways as to reflect a godly character. Titus is to instruct everyone in the church—older men, older women, young women, young men, and even slaves—to live lives of self-control, integrity, and love. But it’s what lies behind that that’s the key to understand. It’s all about grace.

1. KNOWING IT

Chapter 2 of Titus begins with Paul telling Titus to teach the different groups of Christian believers in the churches to live godly lives in the context they find themselves in. What’s the reason Paul gives in verse 11 for all the instructions he gives in the first part of the chapter?

When Paul says in verse 12 that grace “teaches” us to say no to ungodliness and live upright lives instead, the word he’s using literally means “to train” or “to bring up,” as in, to bring up children. What does this mean? How does grace train us to live godly lives?

What are the two things that Jesus does for us in verse 14? In what order do these things appear?

3. DOING IT

Day to day, how do we strive for godliness driven by grace, without descending into legalism?

When it comes to Godliness & change, sometimes we get it right, and sometimes we don’t. How does this passage speak to both of those situations - the disappointment or the pride that comes out of them?

From this passage, would you say that growth in godliness is an anomaly or a given for Christians? How do we fairly assess this in ourselves? How do we encourage it in each other, as well as comforting each other when it seems to be going pear-shaped?

It’s easy to take the credit for the times we make good decisions and live in a way the Bible encourages us to. It’s also easy to continuously beat ourselves up when we fail and fall short of the way God wants us to live. As we pray for each other tonight, ask God that we may be amazed by his grace more and more, and that it would work its way through our minds and hearts. Thank God that, even though we contribute absolutely nothing to our own salvation—or to our own growth in Him—He lavishes us with his grace by redeeming us and then purifying us, step by step, to be more like Jesus.

2. APPLYING IT

Paul says grace is the big motivator for us living godly lives. What are the alternatives to grace being the motivator for godliness? Discuss some of the implications and “signs” when grace isn’t the motivator?

Mark Driscoll (a pastor in Seattle in the US) talks about this “sanctifying grace” (i.e., grace that purifies us). Have a look at the video on Youtube - [youtube.com/watch?v=foHpgCXeoIw](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=foHpgCXeoIw)

(Ignoring his dig at people who get up late) what are your thoughts on this clip? Is there anything that stands out? Discuss it with the group.

How do both the past and the future shape the present for Christians in this passage?

4. SHARING IT

If godliness & change is driven by God’s grace, does this change what we expect of others who don’t know of God’s grace?

How would you share the idea of godliness and change with someone who wasn’t a Christian so as to highlight grace as opposed to legalism or apathy?

GRACE & EVANGELISM

Grace is infectious. Paul was so overcome by God's love for him shown in Jesus that he felt compelled to no longer live for himself but for the one 'who died for all'. He wanted everyone to know that they too could be a new creation, and that this was only possible because of God's grace.



Last week we talked about the way grace brings about change in the Christian's life. It may not be all at once, and it certainly works from the inside out, not the outside in.

Has anything shifted in your thinking this past week about what it means for God's grace to bring about change in your life?

Has it caused you to rest in knowing you can't clean yourself up on your own strength? Or has it perhaps motivated you to strive for godliness knowing that God's grace provides a framework for exercising self-control?

Tonight we want to see what it might look like to carry the same urgency that Paul had when it came to telling others about God's grace. Paul's convinced that we are all fellow workers in the gospel because God has made us ambassadors of Christ.

Have you ever heard someone talking about Jesus or Christianity in a way that has made you want to disassociate yourself with all Christians everywhere?

Have you ever heard someone talking about Jesus or Christianity in a way that was humble, winsome, and kind?

What were your experiences with either event? What do you think the difference was in either approach?

Sometimes we mistake arrogance for boldness. Sometimes we mistake fear for humility. Paul seems to say that there is a right way to boast in the work of the gospel, but it must start with the finished work of Jesus on the cross.



Before you begin, read 2 Corinthians 5:11-6:2 as a group.

1. KNOWING IT

What is Paul's motivating factor in sharing the Gospel? How does this shape his focus in the face of the criticism he seems to be receiving from the Corinthians?

The Gospel of Grace gives Paul both a different motivation in life, but also a different perspective on the world and other people. What is it from 5:16-21?

How then is it loving for Paul to share, and would be unloving for him to water down, the Gospel? What impact does it have on people?

3. DOING IT

Most of us know that telling others about Jesus is a good idea, and we often have good intentions to do so. Would you say that sharing the Gospel is an obligation for Christians?

How does grace inform the way in which we see both our motivation for sharing the Gospel, and the way in which we go about it? (Cf. 1 Peter 2:12)

Paul's an apostle. It's his job to take the Gospel to the Gentiles. What does it look like then for us to live with this Gospel of Grace, wanting to share, but having full-time jobs?

2. APPLYING IT

While Paul sees himself as being compelled by love, he also see himself as working alongside God in the work of sharing the Gospel. He's an Apostle, we're not...so how transferrable is what Paul says about himself, to us?

As we consider the Gospel, discuss whether there are motivations other than God's love compelling us, to share it with others?

4. SHARING IT

2 Cor 5:21 has often been called 'The Great Exchange' and gives us this beautiful summary of the gospel. For our friends and family for who life is usually pretty good, how does this verse speak into a need that the good life in Australia can't fulfil?

How do we balance the sharing of the Gospel with our friends, without shoving it down their throat? Do you have a tendency to be too hesitant or too enthusiastic?

Some people are great at sharing the Gospel, some not so. One of the ways we get better (and less cringe-worthy) is to see other people do it well and to learn from them. Share some things you've learnt over the years that have been helpful in sharing the Gospel with others.

'Now is the time of God's favour, now is the day of salvation.'

As a group, pray for the people you have written down or are thinking about sharing the gospel with this year. Pray that this Scripture might be fulfilled in them. Pray for opportunities to humbly speak to them about Christ's love.

GRACE & COMMUNITY

Tonight we're going to be talking about how God's grace changes the way we see ourselves in relation to other Christians. We want to explore what it looks like to live in community, and to see what the Bible has to say about the purpose or benefit of expressing our Christian life with those around us.



Last week we looked at how God's grace is infectious. As Christians, Christ's love urges us to no longer live just for ourselves, but to act as 'ambassadors' of Jesus so that those around us might come to know the depths of God's love for them.

Did you have any opportunities to talk to people about the gospel this week? What worked for you? What didn't work? How can we pray for one another right now so that we might be more loving and caring ambassadors of Christ?

Although God cares about each of us individually, when he saves us we're not simply reconciled to God on our own but are also brought into a community. The Bible sometimes calls this community 'church', or 'family', or in our passage today, a *body*.

Take some time to think back to when your Christian experience was at its highest point. What was going on relationally during this time? Discuss with one another what that looked like for you.

Read Ephesians 4:1-16. Paul writes to the church in Ephesus, in large part, to expand their understanding of God's grace particularly in relation to the life of the church.

1. KNOWING IT

From this passage, what's the baseline for Christian community- what's it based on?

What does Paul describe the purpose (or effect) or bringing His people into community should be? How do our giftings play into that?

How do we know we are part of a grace-driven community? What are some of the signposts of such community?

3. DOING IT

What are some of the things that make unity & community hard?

What does the idea of grace bring to the discussion of community, conflict, forgiveness & reconciliation?

How does your understanding of community shape the way you view church?

What are some ways you can practically build up the body of Christ- this Growth Group and Village Church?

2. APPLYING IT

On the one hand, being a part of the community of God's people is something completely dependent on Christ's work on our behalf – Jesus extends grace to us, and calls us into a relationship with God and his people (e.g. 4:4-5, 7-8). On the other hand, God urges us to live a life worthy of such a calling (4:1) and to 'make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit' (v. 3). What stops us from enjoying community?

Discuss some of the implications of verse 7 and how that might change the way we view one another.

What are some ways we can 'speak the truth in love' in our community?

4. SHARING IT

Watch this video:

www.youtube.com/watch?v=6OhChrsxEk

What's a distinctive of Christian community that sets it apart from all other forms of community?

What's one tangible thing you can do this week in order to model this difference to your non-Christian community so that God's love might be seen through you?

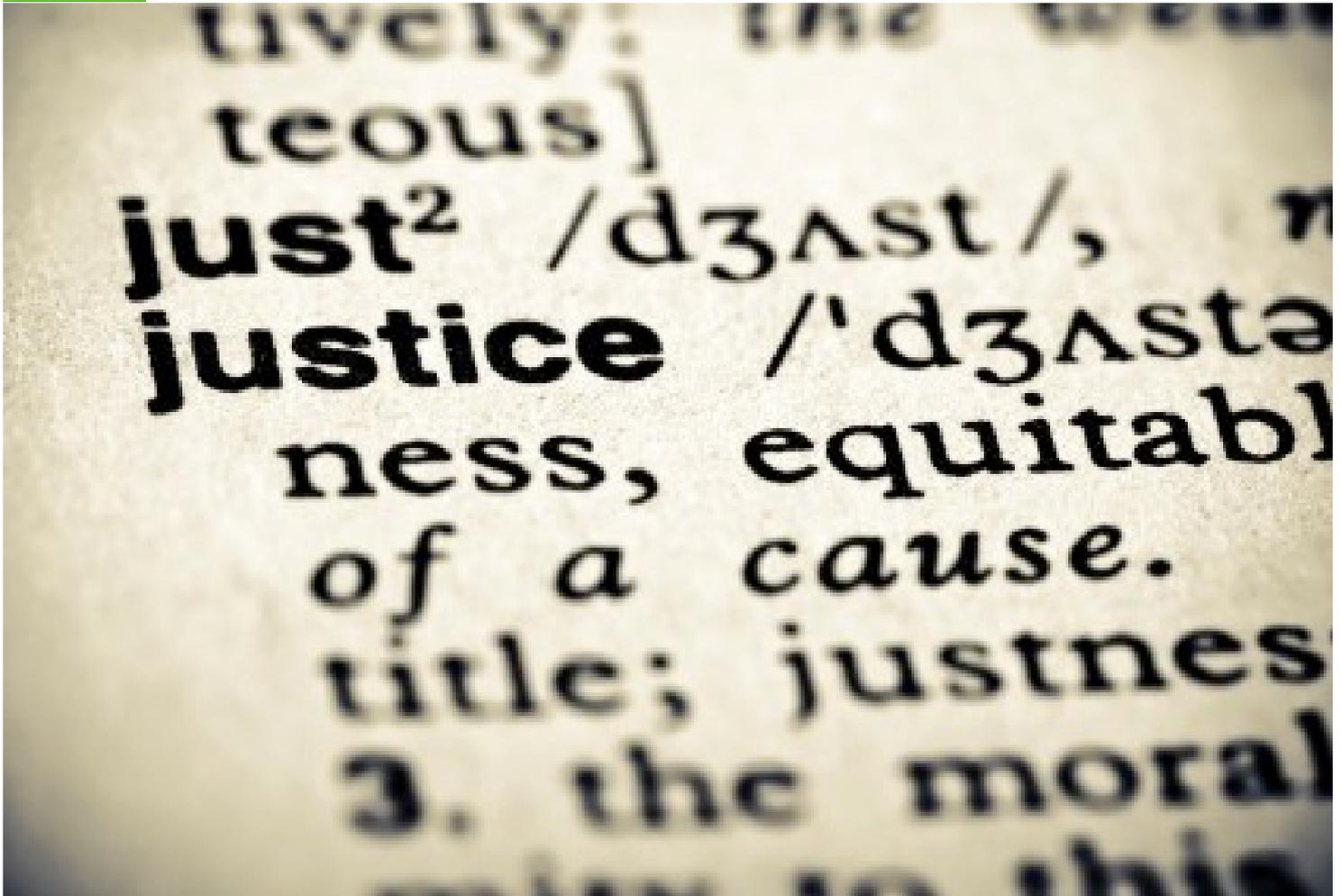
Pray that we wouldn't be stuck in our individuality, but that God would give us a love for his people and a desire to be with them. Pray that we would spur on one another to Christian maturity and would strive to build up our brothers and sisters in Christ. Pray that God would forgive us for the times we have caused disunity and have wrongly looked down on other Christians. Pray that God would give us the grace and creativity to reflect him in our communities that don't yet know Jesus.

GRACE & SOCIAL JUSTICE

Tonight we're looking at the Parable of the Good Samaritan - one of the best known stories in the whole bible. And what we're trying to drill down on tonight is what it looks like to love our neighbours, irrespective of who they are and where we encounter them.

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From last week's discussion on community, share anything you've been thinking about, praying about, challenged about in regards to grace & community.



Social Justice is a topic that's close to the hearts of many in Village Church, and in our society at large.

Begin by sharing some of the things that you're passionate about in this area, some of the things you would like to see changed, or the things that you advocate for.

What do you find hard about these issues? What's hard in working through how to combat them?

Christians should be passionate defenders of the poor, vulnerable and marginalised...because the God that we serve is. But what's worth us understanding as we engage in this tricky area is what the Gospel does in our understanding of it, and how it shapes our response.

Read Luke 10:25-37.

1. KNOWING IT

In this parable, how does Jesus identify who a “neighbour” is in this parable?

What’s the motivation that drives the Samaritan in this parable?

The expert in the law knows what’s required of him (v.27) - love God, love your neighbour - yet he’s really interested in trying to limit the latter (v.29). Discuss what this reveals about his relationship with God?

3. DOING IT

The reality is that we can’t help everyone. As Christians shaped by grace, how do we engage productively, actively but without guilt, in a world that has so many needs

Discuss a time when you felt way out of your comfort zone helping someone. Would you have done it differently now as you reflect on it?

In ‘Gospel in Life’, it asks the question - “It’s natural to want to help people who are like you, who like you, and who you like.” What would it mean for you, specifically, to help people who are not like you, who do not like you, and who you do not like?

*He has shown you, O mortal, what is good.
And what does the Lord require of you?
To act justly and to love mercy
and to walk humbly with your God. (Micah 6:8)*

Pray this week that we can be great stewards of showing God’s grace to our neighbours. Pray that we can remember just how amazing God’s grace through Jesus is for us, and that it will be reflected through our actions to people in need of love and support.

2. APPLYING IT

What’s behind the motivation we often have to limit those we show love towards? What reasons do we give? When are they good reasons, and when aren’t they?

Check out this spoken word performance by Propaganda.

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BuweBjA5aEw>

Do we possess a ‘we-them’ mentality when it comes to serving people in need?

How does the idea of grace shatter this divide?

4. SHARING IT

If a friend asked you why you’d want to help someone in need, what’s the answer that the Gospel of Grace drives us towards? How does it differ from other answers people might give?

Spend some time discussing how over the coming year, we as individuals, as a group, and as a church can demonstrate God’s grace towards others?

GRACE & STEWARDSHIP

Money plays a huge role in our lives when you think about it. We spend our days working for it, thinking about it, wishing we had more of it, spending it on things we need, and spending even more of it on things we want. But the gospel completely reorients the way we think about money. Tonight we'll be exploring how God's grace to us impacts our generosity to others.



It goes without saying that we're a wealthy country. And even those of us who don't have very much have more, and have access to more, than the overwhelming majority of others in the world. But a discussion of how Christians understand what they have, and use what they have, never starts from lack or abundance. It begins with God's grace in Jesus.

As you consider the idea of stewardship, what does that mean to you? What areas can it cover?

As you look around at those you know who are generous, or famous philanthropists, what would you say it is that drives them?

The church in Corinth has come up with a great plan to help struggling Christians around the world: they're going to raise some funds and give them to the apostles to distribute. The only problem is that they haven't yet done what they said they would do. So in his letter to them, Paul encourages them to finish what they've started and he gives them the reason why.

Read 2 Corinthians 8:1-9. While in this passage Paul is talking to the Corinthians primarily about money, the way they use their money is just an implication of the grace they've been shown in Jesus. So as we read, understand and consider this, it's a passage that's worth considering not merely for how we use our money, but our gifts & resources also.

1. KNOWING IT

What is it from this passage that Paul is encouraging the Corinthians to do?

Discuss the motivational techniques Paul uses, and the ones he deliberately doesn't, getting the Corinthians thinking about how they're going to use their finances.

We often think that it's the abundance of what we have that's the drive for generosity, but that's not the case with the Macedonians. In terms of what Paul is arguing here, what do we learn from the Macedonians?

3. DOING IT

The rule in the New Testament when it comes to giving is never tithing, it's always generosity. So living under grace now, what (practically) does generosity look like in our giving? How much is generous?

Some fear talking about how they use their money for fear of boasting or being seen as ungenerous, and some like talking about it a little bit too much. But we need to talk about it so as not to slip into greed and to let Grace affect every area of our lives. As Christians, how do we do that in a way that's helpful? How do we balance that with Matthew 6:2-4?

If we were to push the discussion about generosity further afield than just our finances, what would it look like to be good stewards with what we have been given?

Spend some time giving thanks for what we have in Jesus, and for the opportunity we have in this country to be so generous.

2. APPLYING IT

So it's not about how much we have, and it's not about how much we give...but in what ways do you think how we use what we have is an indicator of our hearts?

In his book *Generous Justice*, Tim Keller writes: "A lack of generosity refuses to acknowledge that your assets are not really yours, but God's." Discuss this statement. Do you agree with it?

2 Corinthians 8:9 is really the centre of Paul's argument. What does it say about our understanding of grace, God & our future if we struggle to part with it?

4. SHARING IT

Tied in with the issue of social justice, there are so many needs in the world that it's hard to know where to start. As Christians who know that this world is passing, that people need Jesus in order to have hope for eternity, yet seeing the real struggles of people around us - how do we balance the use of our money between specifically Christian ministry, and work (even if run by Christians) of social justice?

Because of the some sections of the Church's appalling use of money, and their greed for it, some people who aren't Christians are suspicious when Christians talk about money. How do we talk about it in such a way that reflects not greed, but grace?

KEY EVENTS

MPC BIBLE TEACHING WEEKEND

28 Feb-2 Mar, held at MPC. On the Friday night there's a bushdance (Kloky's band), and dinner. Throughout the weekend there'll be bible teaching and music workshops by Rob Smith, lecturer at SMBC Sydney, and part of Emu Music. Watch out for more details in the bulletin.

EASTER SERVICES

There'll be a Good Friday service (18 April) back at MPC, and an Easter Sunday service at Village as normal.

FOOD FOR THOUGHT - 15 MAY

Dave McDonald, a minister in Canberra, is coming up to talk about life & suffering. For the past few years, Dave has been going through Chemotherapy and battling cancer, and has written a book reflecting on what he's gone through in light of being a Christian. This'll be a great opportunity to invite friends.

