

Sunday, August 2, 2026

Character of God: Grace

Ex 34:6-7; Ps 51:1-2; John 1:14-18

1. Earned or Given?

Read each example and have students decide whether it is **earned**, **deserved**, or **given as grace**.

- You work all week and receive a paycheck.
- You study hard and earn a good grade.
- Someone buys you lunch for your birthday.
- You break something and another person pays to replace it.
- You fail an assignment, but your teacher allows you to redo it.
- Someone forgives you even though you cannot undo what you did.
- A coach puts you into a game because you practiced hard.
- Someone invites you to sit with them when everyone else is ignoring you.

Ask:

- Which of these were earned?
- Which were freely given?
- Which ones would be hardest to receive?
- Is it sometimes easier to earn something than to admit we need a gift?
- Why might receiving grace make someone uncomfortable?

We often think life should work like a paycheck: do enough good things, and you receive something good in return. Biblical grace works differently. Grace is goodness given as a gift.

2. Review God's Description

Read Exodus 34:6–7.

Remind students of the setting:

- God had rescued Israel from slavery.
- Israel entered a covenant with God.
- The people almost immediately worshiped the golden calf.
- Moses pleaded with God not to abandon them.
- God renewed his covenant and described his own character.

Ask:

- What words have we studied so far?
- What did compassion teach us about God?
- Why is the golden calf important when we talk about grace?

God called himself gracious immediately after Israel had proven that they did not deserve his favor.

God's grace was not a reward for Israel's faithfulness. It was an expression of God's character.

3. Understanding the Hebrew Word

The Hebrew word translated **gracious** in Exodus 34:6 is *khanun*. It comes from the word *khen*, which can communicate beauty, delight, favor, or a generous response toward another person.

The expression “to find *khen* in someone's eyes” appears repeatedly in the Hebrew Bible. It usually describes someone in a lower or more vulnerable position receiving favor from someone with greater authority or ability. include:

- Joseph finding favor with Potiphar
- Ruth finding favor with Boaz
- Esther asking the king for favor
- People asking God to look upon them with favor

Explain:

“Grace happens when someone who has the power to give chooses to look favorably upon someone who is unable to demand, earn, or repay the gift.”

God is *khanun*. He consistently gives life and goodness to human beings, even though humanity repeatedly corrupts God’s world and harms one another. How is favor different from merely feeling sorry for someone?

- Why does the person with greater power have a special opportunity to show grace?
- What are some situations where one person has the ability to lift someone else up?
- How could students use their influence to show favor to someone usually overlooked?

4. Watch the Video

5. Discussion Guide

A. Defining Grace

1. What stood out to you from the video?

Possible follow-ups:

- Was anything new or surprising?
- Did the video change how you define grace?
- Was any part difficult to understand?
- Which biblical example was most helpful?

2. How would you explain grace without using the word “grace”?

Let students develop their own definitions.

Possible answers:

- Receiving goodness that you did not earn
- Being treated with favor
- Receiving another opportunity after failure
- Being welcomed when you expected rejection

- Someone using their power to lift you up
- God giving himself to people who cannot save themselves

A simple definition to write down:

Grace is God's generous favor given as a gift.

3. What is the difference between grace and a reward?

A reward is connected to performance. Grace is connected to the generosity of the giver.

Ask:

- What happens when we treat God's love like something we must earn?
- How might someone behave if they believed God only liked them when they were doing well?
- What happens to our confidence when it is based entirely on our performance?
- Can good behavior ever make God owe us something?

Obedience matters, but obedience is our response to grace—not the price we pay to receive it.

B. The Desire to Earn Approval

4. Where do teenagers feel pressure to prove their worth?

Possible answers:

- Grades
- Sports
- Appearance
- Popularity
- Relationships
- Social media
- Family expectations
- Church behavior
- Achievements

- Being funny, tough, attractive, or successful

Ask:

- How do you know when you are looking for approval?
- How much of social media is built around trying to find favor in someone's eyes?
- What happens when your sense of worth depends on how people respond to you?
- Can you ever collect enough approval to feel permanently secure?

Human approval constantly changes. God's grace begins with his character, not our ability to impress him.

5. Why might religious people struggle to receive grace?

Possible reasons:

- We want to believe we are better than others.
- We like feeling that God owes us.
- Grace forces us to admit that we need help.
- We compare our behavior to someone else's.
- We confuse spiritual disciplines with earning God's love.
- We believe failure has disqualified us.

Ask:

- Is it possible to attend church, read the Bible, and still try to earn God's love?
- What is the difference between obeying God to earn love and obeying because we are loved?
- Which motivation produces greater joy?
- Which motivation produces fear and exhaustion?

C. Grace Toward the Undeserving

6. Does a person need grace because they are innocent or because they are guilty?

Grace is most clearly seen when it reaches someone who cannot claim that they deserve favorable treatment.

In the Bible, God gives grace to people with very different stories. Noah finds favor with God, but Jacob also describes God as gracious toward him despite Jacob's history of deception. Israel receives renewed favor after the golden calf. The most surprising expressions of grace are often shown toward those who have not earned them. Why is grace toward a good person easier to accept?

- Why does grace toward a guilty person sometimes feel unfair?
- Are there people we secretly believe do not deserve another opportunity?
- What does our answer reveal about how we understand our own need for grace?

7. Should everyone receive grace?

Possible follow-ups:

- Are some actions too serious to forgive?
- Does forgiveness mean trusting someone immediately?
- Does grace eliminate consequences?
- Can you show grace while maintaining boundaries?
- Can you forgive someone and still involve authorities or trusted adults?
- Is protecting someone from consequences always loving?

Clarify:

Grace does not mean pretending nothing happened. Grace tells the truth about sin while refusing to believe that failure must have the final word.

Grace and justice are not enemies. A person may receive forgiveness while still facing consequences, rebuilding trust, seeking help, or making restitution.

8. Does grace give people permission to keep sinning?

Read Romans 6:1–4 or summarize Paul's question: Should we continue sinning so that grace can increase?

Ask:

- What was Paul's answer?

- Why would truly understanding grace lead someone toward change?
- What is the difference between receiving grace and taking advantage of someone?
- How does grace create gratitude?
- How can gratitude become obedience?

Grace accepts us before we have fixed ourselves, but grace does not leave us enslaved to what is destroying us.

God's grace gives us a new life, not merely permission to continue in the old one.

D. David's Prayer for Grace

Read Psalm 51:1–4.

Explain that David prayed this after his sin involving Bathsheba and Uriah had been exposed.

David does not claim:

- That he had good intentions
- That someone else was responsible
- That his good actions outweighed his sin
- That he deserved another opportunity

He appeals to God's character:

Be gracious to me according to your loyal love and compassion.

9. What does David's prayer teach us about confession?

Possible answers:

- We do not have to defend ourselves.
- We can tell the truth about what we have done.
- We appeal to God's mercy rather than our goodness.
- Confession is agreeing with God instead of managing our image.
- God's grace makes honesty possible.

Ask:

- Why do we hide sin?
- What are we afraid will happen if we tell the truth?
- How does grace give us courage to confess?
- Which is more spiritually dangerous: failing or refusing to admit failure?
- What is the difference between feeling guilty and truly repenting?

Grace gives us a safe place to tell the truth, but not a hiding place from the truth.

E. Grace in the Story of Ruth

Read Ruth 2:8–13.

Provide the setting:

- Ruth was a widow.
- She was a foreigner in Israel.
- She had little social standing.
- She depended on gathering leftover grain to survive.
- Boaz had land, resources, and influence.

Boaz allowed Ruth to gather safely in his fields, instructed his workers to protect her, provided water, and made sure she received more than the minimum.

Ruth responded:

“Why have I found favor in your eyes that you notice me—a foreigner?”

10. How did Boaz use his position to show grace?

Possible answers:

- He noticed Ruth.
- He protected her.
- He provided for her.
- He treated her with dignity.
- He gave more than the law required.
- He used his authority for someone vulnerable.

Ask:

- Who usually gets ignored at school?
- How can popularity or influence be used to lift someone up?
- What is the difference between serving someone and treating them like a charity project?
- How can grace preserve someone's dignity?
- What could our youth group learn from Boaz?

Grace does not merely give things to people. Grace sees people and treats them as valuable.

F. Jesus Is Full of Grace and Truth

Read John 1:14–18.

John describes Jesus as being full of **grace and truth**, echoing God's description of himself in Exodus 34. Jesus does not merely teach people about God's grace. Jesus embodies God's grace and brings it near to humanity. . What does it mean that Jesus is full of both grace and truth?

Ask:

- What happens when someone emphasizes truth without grace?
- What happens when someone emphasizes grace without truth?
- Did Jesus avoid telling people the truth about sin?
- Did Jesus treat sinful people as disposable?
- How did Jesus combine honesty with welcome?
- Which side are Christians sometimes tempted to neglect?

Grace without truth can become permission. Truth without grace can become condemnation. Jesus brings both together perfectly.

Jesus tells the truth about humanity's condition while offering himself as the way to forgiveness, freedom, and restored relationship with God.

12. Where do you see Jesus showing grace?

Possible examples:

- Eating with tax collectors and sinners
- Protecting the dignity of the woman caught in adultery
- Speaking with the Samaritan woman
- Restoring Peter after his denial
- Forgiving those who crucified him
- Welcoming children
- Touching people considered unclean
- Giving his life for sinners

Ask:

- Did these people earn Jesus' attention?
- Did grace mean Jesus approved of everything they had done?
- What changed because Jesus treated them with grace?
- How does the cross reveal the cost of grace?

G. Saved by Grace

Read Ephesians 2:8–10.

13. What does Paul say we contribute to our salvation?

Salvation is God's gift. It is not something we accomplish through enough good works.

Ask:

- Why does Paul say no one can boast?
- How does grace create humility?
- Should Christians ever look down on people who do not know Jesus?
- What do we have that we did not first receive from God?
- Why do good works still matter if they do not save us?

Point out the movement in the passage:

1. We are saved **by grace**.
2. We receive salvation **through faith**.

3. Salvation is **God's gift**.
4. We are recreated **for good works**.

Good works are not the cause of salvation. They are the result of salvation.

14. How should receiving grace change the way we treat others?

Ask:

- Should gracious people be quick or slow to shame others?
- How should grace change the way we respond when someone admits failure?
- How should grace affect our friendships?
- How should grace affect how we talk about people online?
- What does grace look like when someone annoys us?
- Can we give grace without allowing someone to mistreat us?

Possible applications:

- Refusing to humiliate someone
- Listening before judging
- Giving someone another opportunity
- Forgiving
- Speaking gently
- Including someone
- Helping without demanding recognition
- Telling the truth with kindness
- Refusing to define someone by their worst moment

6. Closing Activity: Receiving and Giving Grace

Give each student a piece of paper and ask them to complete these statements privately:

- 1. One area where I need God's grace is...**
- 2. One lie grace helps me reject is...**
- 3. One person I can treat with grace is...**
- 4. One gracious action I can take is...**

Remind them not to write anything they would be uncomfortable with someone else seeing.

Then say:

We cannot give grace because we believe people have earned it. We give grace because God first gave grace to us.

Grace Challenge for the Week

Notice someone. Give what they have not earned. Expect nothing in return.

Examples:

- Encourage someone who cannot repay you.
- Include someone who has been overlooked.
- Forgive a small offense instead of holding it over them.
- Give someone credit.
- Speak well of someone who is usually criticized.
- Help without posting about it.
- Respond calmly when you could embarrass someone.
- Offer another opportunity when wisdom allows it.
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