



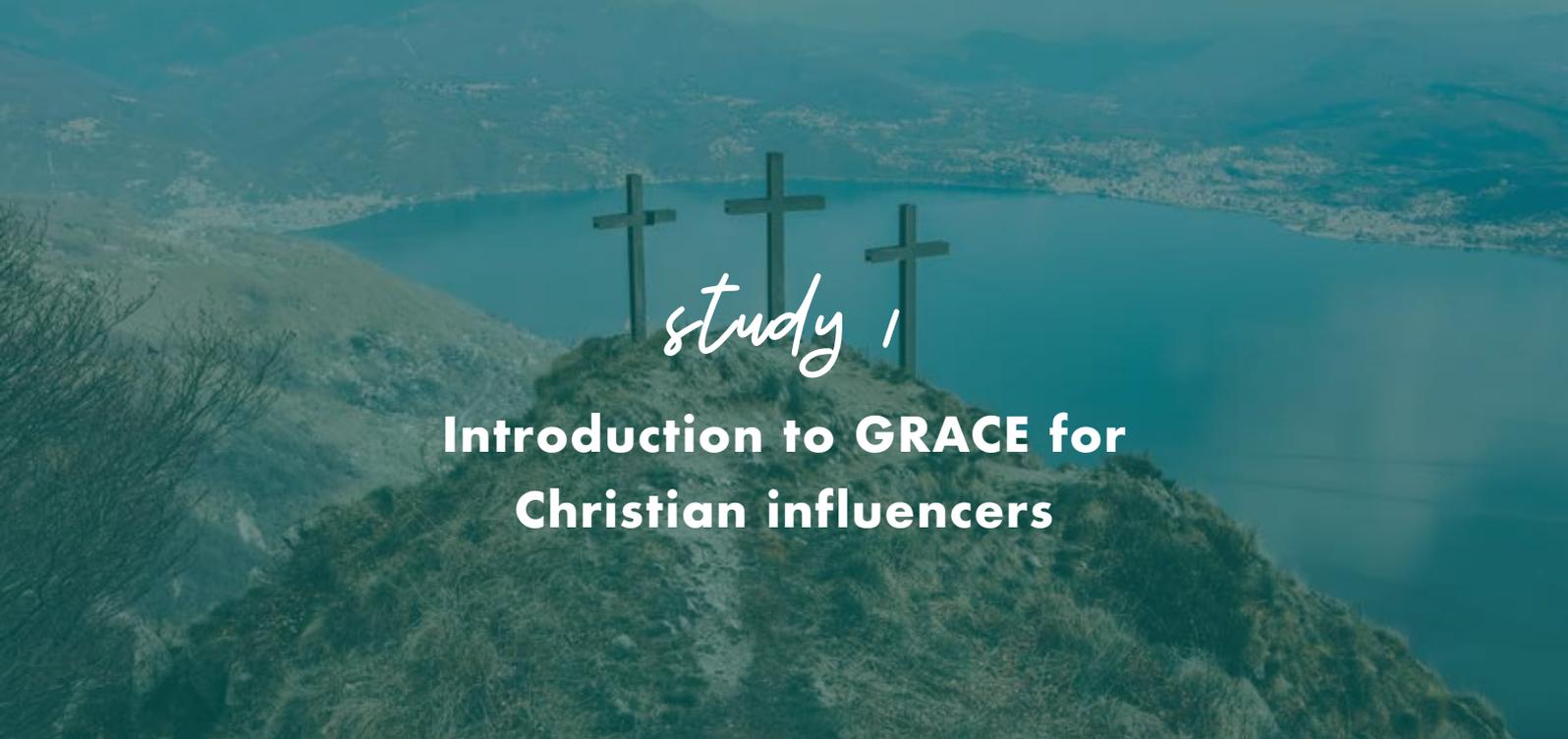
CHRISTIAN LEADERSHIP FOUNDATIONS

Passion One:

Grace

from grace to sway

THE SEVEN PASSIONS OF BIBLICAL LEADERS



study 1

Introduction to GRACE for Christian influencers

In most historical records up to modern times, leaders have been heroes. They are people of extraordinary talent and ability who have no real failings. They never put a foot wrong. Historians who wrote about the flaws of their leaders usually didn't last long. It's the same in many totalitarian regimes in the world today. The leaders are feted as men (and occasionally women) of immense wisdom, capacity and capability.

The Bible is so different. **It's brutally honest.** It's full of very flawed leaders who sometimes seem to get as many things wrong as they get right. They fail, ignore God, sin and fall flat on their faces. They are as much models of what not to do as models of what to do.

Take King David as an example. No-one did a better job leading Israel. Yet you wouldn't get that impression from the biblical record of his reign. The Bible tells us that he made lots of poor calls, he couldn't lead his kids, he constantly struggled with major opposition, and on top of that he committed adultery and murdered. Not the kind of leader you would hold up as a model of godly leadership. Yet he was just that – a leader with God's heart who did what God wanted (Acts 13:22).

There is something at the centre of Christian leadership that explains the fallibility yet godliness of God's leaders. It's called GRACE. If you don't get it, you can never really influence God's way.

The ultimate Christian foundation

At the heart of Christian faith lies incredibly good news: that Jesus lived, died and rose again to save sinners like you and me (1 Tim. 1:15). We will never deserve his forgiveness and we can never earn it. Our new life comes as a completely free gift that only needs to be received. This is what Paul wrote to Timothy:

He [God] has saved us and called us to a holy life—not because of anything we have done but because of his own purpose and grace. This grace was given us in

Christ Jesus before the beginning of time, but it has now been revealed through the appearing of our Saviour, Christ Jesus, who has destroyed death and has brought life and immortality to light through the gospel. (2 Tim. 1:9-10)

Grace is God's unmerited favour towards those who don't deserve it and can never earn it. He offers his grace as a gift to those who, because of their rebellion, have no claim on it. We are put right with God because of God's grace revealed and mediated through Jesus.

GRACE is not only the way of entry into God's kingdom, it is actually the foundation for everything Christian.

Christian life always starts with our receiving God's grace. There is no other way into the kingdom of God. We enter as children, offering nothing but our need, and receiving everything through God's grace. As Paul says:

But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions—it is by grace you have been saved. And God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus, in order that in the coming ages he might show the incomparable riches of his grace, expressed in his kindness to us in Christ Jesus. (Eph. 2:4-7)

GRACE is not only the way of entry into God's kingdom, it is actually the foundation for everything Christian, including our ministry and influence. All we do for God comes through his grace. None of it is deserved or earned. All God's blessing in and through our lives comes through grace, God's unmerited favour.

We constantly rest in and rely on GRACE. So when we consider how God wants to use us to influence others, we need to be clear that it's not because he thinks we have the ability to do these things well, but because he has sovereignly designed us for these tasks and in his grace, he offers them to us. He includes us in his work. As Paul says:

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. For we are God's handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do. (Eph. 2:8-10)

Unless we are deeply immersed in GRACE, we have little to offer as Christian influencers. I know this is a big call. But everything we do must revolve around the unmerited grace of God in and through our lives. Our influence is his work. It's his will. It's his power. It's his calling. It's his resources. Any results we appear to achieve, originate from his ministry. Any part we get to play comes through his grace towards us. God's grace in Jesus stands as the foundation stone of all Christian influence.

Unfortunately, many Christians leaders start on a grace footing, but as results begin to flow (or not flow), they start to think that they have earned their influence and success (or deserve their failure and lack of impact). They stop living in and depending on GRACE and this inevitably damages their

spiritual lives and undermines their Christian influence.

So Christian influence begins with the grace revealed in Christ. GRACE must be at the core of all Christian influence. This week we will explore what a passion for GRACE looks like in those who influence others for God.

JOURNAL ACTIVITY 1.1

Write a prayer of thanks to God for his grace to you.

A scenic landscape featuring three wooden crosses standing on a grassy hill. In the background, a large body of water, likely a lake or reservoir, stretches across the valley, surrounded by rolling hills under a clear sky. The text 'study 2' is written in a white, cursive font over the crosses.

study 2

Personal Implications of GRACE

There are numerous biblical principles that flow from the foundation of GRACE. As I briefly describe some of them, it would be helpful for you to check just how well you believe and hold on to each principle. This will assist you to assess your grasp of GRACE. If you find a principle that is difficult for you to accept and trust, ponder on it and read through the Scriptures listed.

1. I have been created in grace by God: he has designed me and has given me my gifts.

(Psalm 139:13-14; Rom. 12:6-8; 1 Cor. 12:7-11)

God has created me and designed me for his purpose. Through his grace, he has given me my personality, my gifts, my talents, my experiences, my background, etc. I have been carefully created and developed by God in his grace for the purposes he has planned for me.

2. I am a flawed/broken person: I will never get it right and I am not as good as others think. *(Rom. 7:14-25; 1 Tim. 1:15-16; 2 Cor. 4:7; 1 John 1:8-9)*

There is a brokenness about me because of my humanity and I will not escape this until I am completely freed in God's new creation. The Spirit works on my sinfulness through the process of sanctification, but I have a long way to go. My motives are often mixed, I get a lot of things wrong, and my brokenness continually plagues me. I constantly need to confess and repent of my sin. That's reality. God knows it. He has seen me at my worst. And the incredible thing is that it does not stop God in his grace using me.

3. I have been called and saved by Jesus: I'm right with God because he has chosen me. *(2 Tim. 1:9-10; Eph. 2:4-20; Rom. 5:8; Rom. 8:29-30)*

The whole plan of salvation was God's idea. He designed the plan. He made the way for me to be right with God through Jesus. In grace, he chooses those he wants to be saved so that they might love and serve him. It's all God's work. My total role was to receive his grace. So I'm not saved because of anything I have done. It all rests on Jesus and his work. He is the giver and I am the receiver.

4. I am deeply accepted and loved by my Father: God loves me just the way I am. (Rom. 8:31-39; Eph. 3:17-19; Col. 3:12; 1 Thess. 1:4; 1 John 3:1)

Despite my brokenness and sin, God still really, really loves me. He chose me in the middle of all my sin and continues to pour out his love on me. In fact, nothing can stop him doing that. I don't always love myself, but God continues to love me and stand with me whatever I do. In his grace, he chooses to see me through Jesus, so I'm safe forever in his love whether I succeed or fail, whether I do what's right or wrong.

5. God has kingdom work he calls me to do: God plans to bear fruit through me. (John 15:16; Matt. 28:19-20; Acts 1:8; Rom. 7:4; Eph. 3:7-9; Eph. 4:16)

God has not just called me to enjoy him forever. He has work that he wants me to do. I am to bear fruit. Some of that fruit will be in the spiritual growth and beauty of my life, but much will be kingdom fruit that comes as I serve using the gifts he has given me. God doesn't ultimately need me, but in his grace he chooses to include me in the bringing of his kingdom. I have a vital part to play.

6. I can't do what God wants me to do: what God wants is beyond my ability and gifts. (1 Cor. 2:1-5; John 15:4; 1 Cor. 1:26-29; 2 Cor. 12:7-10; Jam. 4:13-15)

I am not smart enough or godly enough or powerful enough to achieve what God wants. No matter how hard I try and pray and serve, I just don't have the ability or gifting or capacity to do it. It's way too hard for me. I wish I could achieve all that God asks, but I just don't have it in me. God's expectations are too high. His call takes me way beyond my natural abilities.

7. I am filled and empowered by the Holy Spirit: God lives in me to enable me to bear fruit. (Acts 1:4-8; John 15:5; John 16:5-15; Acts 4:31)

As the disciples had Jesus to teach them and help them and guide them, I now have the Holy Spirit living in me to provide the gifts and fruit and power that I need to pursue God's call. The Holy Spirit is one of God's grace gifts to me. As I rely on the Spirit, God works through me and does things that I could never achieve on my own.

The more you remain connected and dependant on God, the more you will see Him working in your life.

8. I am completely dependent on God for his work through me: ultimately God has to do the work because it's his gracious plan and his power. (1 Pet. 4:11; 1 Cor. 2:1-5; 2 Cor. 3:4-6)

While I have to put significant effort into the work God has called me to do, any kingdom results inevitably come from him. He is the one who changes lives, not me. The more I remain connected to and dependent on God, the more I will see his working through my life.

9. I want God to be pleased and honoured: I'm not looking for personal attention or praise. (John 3:29-30; 2 Cor. 4:7; Jude 1:24-25; Rom. 15:17-19)

Because ultimately this is God's grace work not mine, I don't want people to get confused and

Do not compare yourself to others who have been gifted and called in different ways through God's grace.

think that somehow the results of my ministry come from my effort or abilities. I'm not looking for attention and praise (although encouragement is helpful). I want God to be pleased and pray that he will be honoured for the way he uses me.

My call and capacity to influence come through God's grace. He has chosen me to influence others. Therefore, he has gifted me with the gifts I need, provided me with the right personality for what he wants me to do, and given me a group of people to influence. Then he has promised that he will provide strength for me and give me help and direction. All these come as part of God's gift to me. They can never be earned. There is no point in comparing myself to others who have been gifted and called in different ways through God's grace. I appreciate what God has undeservedly given me, has done for me, and is doing through me.

Christians of influence are primarily followers of Jesus and are deeply dependent on God. We understand that our capacities come from God's hand, our achievements are because of God's power, and our influence is through God's grace. Nothing we accomplish can ultimately be traced to our ability or effort, but all is a result of GRACE through our lives. In following Jesus, we do what God asks in the power of his Spirit. Christ is both the reason for our influence and the power behind our influence.

In subsequent weeks, I will consider some of our responsibilities as Christian influencers, but here I'm saying that basically influence is not about me or you and what we do and achieve. This is God's work. He is building his kingdom. He is the doer. It's about recognising and appreciating his GRACE. It's about being God's child: depending on him and taking delight in his successes and holding on to him in what may appear to us to be failures and disappointments.

This is not easy. We are so used to doing things ourselves. **But God is calling us to appreciate his grace, and honour and trust him.**

Our passion for GRACE means that ultimately, we seek to influence, not because we have superior skills or greater wisdom or better character, but because we have been called to influence through God's grace and because we want to honour and serve Jesus. Christ is the centre of our attention and we want those we influence to grasp that he is the strength and power behind our service.

In a sense, Christians of influence are pleased to serve with a limp. **We accept our own brokenness and inability and are not ashamed of this, because basically we're not trying to prove ourselves or build a reputation, but to humbly follow Christ and point people to him.**

Our influence is not about our desires, but God's desires. We are recipients of God's grace and are offering and demonstrating this grace to others. Our passion for GRACE pervades our influence and allows God's power to effectively work through us.

JOURNAL ACTIVITY 1.2

Take some time to let God's grace sink deep into your spirit by praying the following prayers aloud.

Brokenness: Father, I mess things up all the time and I don't rely on you the way I should. I thank you that my weakness will not stop you loving me or working through me, but please forgive me and fill me.

Creation: Thank you for the way you have created me. I can think of lots of things I would like to be better at, maybe that will come with time, but I trust your decision in designing me with my strengths and limitations. I thank you for my "jar of clay."

God's Choice: I have no idea why you would choose and adopt me as your child. It certainly wasn't because of anything I've done. But you sacrificed your Son for me and called me as your child. What incredible grace! I am so thankful.

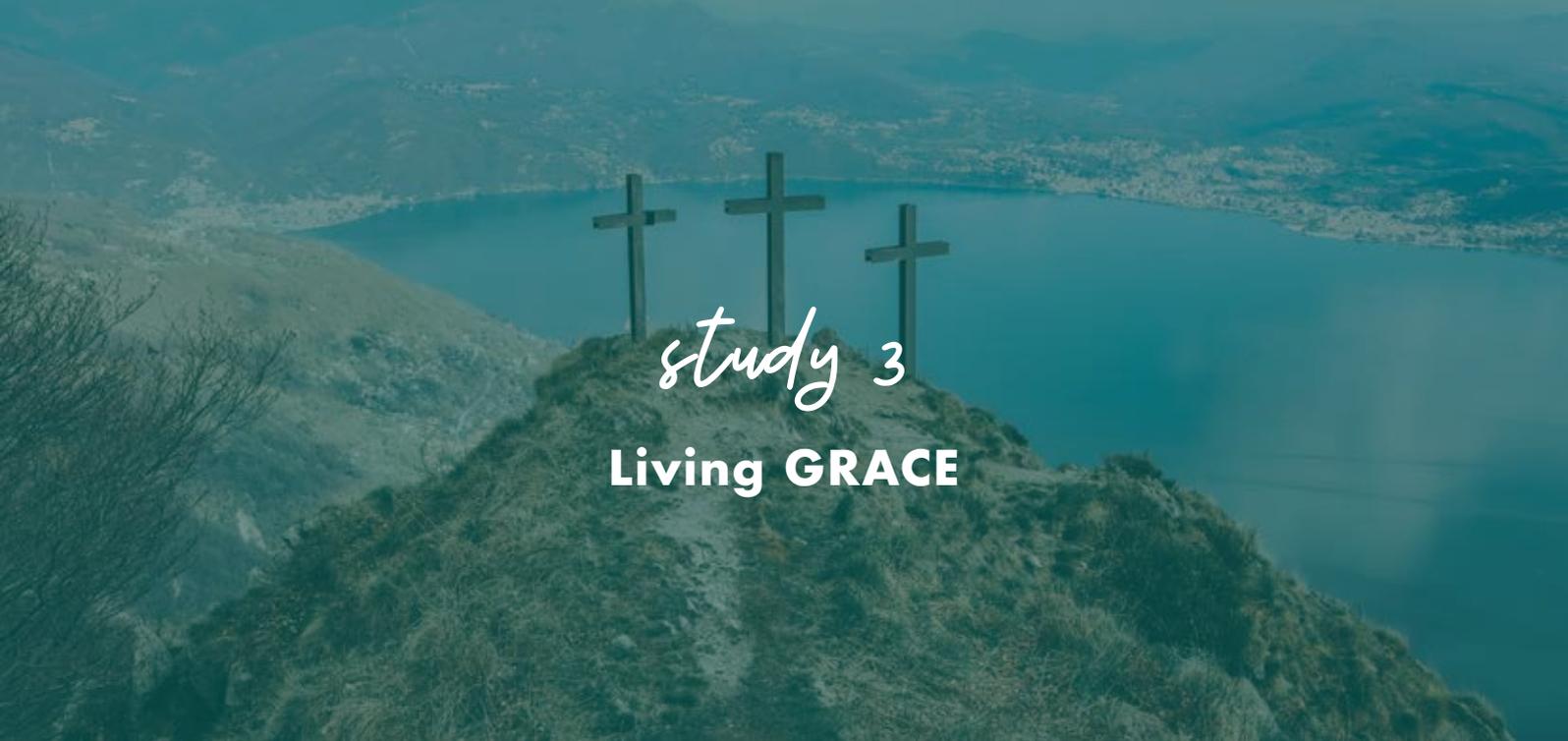
God's Love: You love me way beyond my wildest dreams. Even when I'm broken and failing, you still care for me just as much. I am the apple of your eye and I know that you will love me forever as you have promised.

The Filling of Holy Spirit: It's so good to know that I don't have to live by myself or for myself any more. Your Spirit is filling me and teaching me and empowering me and growing me. I wish I was a better partner in this, but I'm so glad that Holy Spirit is working in and through me, even when I'm finding it tough.

My Influence: You have called me to influence and I want you to know that I'll give it my best shot. But you're going to have to really help me. I'm so glad this is your work, not mine.

My Passion: I want to make a difference, but Lord I really am not looking for all the attention. I like it best when you get noticed and those I influence think that you're great. What difference do these prayers make in your mind and heart?

What difference do these prayers make in your mind and heart?



study 3

Living GRACE

In one way, a GRACE base makes Christian leadership more challenging than secular leadership. We can't just charge ahead with our own ideas and dreams, but need to humbly seek God and obey God. We view success as being a gift of God's grace not a sign of our ability or hard work. We want those we influence to recognise God's grace through our attitudes and approaches.

We lay down our lives for those we seek to influence, whether they appreciate it or not. We recognise that the means we employ are just as important as the ends, and so we seek to please God in all we do, even when it comes with a cost. We celebrate God's grace through the successes of others.

Basically, our influence is about Jesus, not us. This can be a real challenge. Living by GRACE usually is, especially in times of success. When things are going well, it's easy to think that we are better than we really are.

In another way, **God's grace makes Christian influence more liberating. We appreciate his grace and know that failure is not the end.** We can be honest about our brokenness. We don't have to pretend to be better, more competent, or more successful than we are. We don't cover up all our weaknesses, mistakes and insecurities. We recognise that faithfulness to God, not performance, is the real measure of success.

We know that we have Christ's grace and power to do the things to which he calls us, and that he can do immeasurably more than what we could imagine in us and through us (Eph. 3:20). We know that he hears our cries for help. We rest in the fact that ultimately influence is God's responsibility and that he will achieve all that he plans. God's grace means we're significant to God, no matter what happens to our ministry. Yes, GRACE provides great security and strength and sets us free as Christians of influence.

We are called to lay down our lives for those we seek to influence.

Keep this in mind as you work through these biblical passions of influence. You will find many areas in which you can improve, and you should work at it. But you'll never get influence completely right. You can't, and you don't have to. Christians of influence are ultimately effective because they follow Jesus and rely on his grace and power, not because they follow the biblical principles of influence.

True appreciation of GRACE will be most clearly expressed in our prayer life. When we truly grasp that influence is God's work in which he has given us a part through his grace, then we confidently seek him and rely on him. We genuinely need God and prayer becomes vital.

True appreciation of grace will be most clearly expressed in our prayer life.

I have tackled the biblical passion of GRACE first because it is foundational and pervades every aspect of Christian influence. If we don't live in Christ's grace, then there is little to distinguish Christian influence from effective, ethical, secular leadership. An appreciation of and dependence on God's GRACE is the fundamental difference that characterises Christians of influence and separates them from all other people of influence. This is at the heart of all we do.

Signs that I'm GRACE-based

I hope that you're convinced that living in GRACE is fundamental to your serving God and influencing others. But how can you tell whether you really have grasped GRACE so that it has become a true passion in your life? This is of course a lifetime process, but here are some of the results that an appreciation of GRACE brings.

1. I feel a deep sense of peace. I know that God is in control and he is building his kingdom. I know that in his grace he is working everything for my good. I know that I am not ultimately responsible for God's work; that he does what he decides is best. I trust God and this results in peace.

2. I have a thankful attitude. I deeply appreciate all that God has done and is doing in his grace in and through my life. I know that it is undeserved, so I am very thankful.

3. I am honest about my weaknesses. I don't have to make others think that I've got it all together because I haven't. God in his grace still loves and accepts me just the way I am. This gives me great freedom. I don't have to always be right. I don't have to pretend.

4. I keep asking for God's forgiveness and run to him when I fail. Because I need God so much, I don't want to be distant from him. I realise that I am still very broken and in some ways my sin seems to grow bigger as I dwell on his grace. But God forgives me and I start again, clean and right.

5. I am humble about my gifts and achievements. I appreciate the things that God does through me and I take pleasure in seeing God at work. But I don't get carried away with my success.

I know that under God's gracious hand, seasons will come and go. Because I know that God is the power behind it all, I'm careful not to draw too much attention to myself. I remain humble.

6. I cope with disappointment. In the same way that I don't take too much credit for what God does, I also don't take too much responsibility. Oh, I'll give it my best shot, but in the end this is God's work not mine. He is the boss; I am included through his grace. So when things don't turn out, I am disappointed, but not disillusioned. I agree with Job when he said in a very disappointing season, "The Lord gave and the Lord has taken away; may the name of the Lord be praised" (Job 1:21).

7. I constantly look for God's direction. Because God is the leader, it makes sense to get aboard with what he is doing, rather than doing my own thing. He is in charge and I am following, so I look for his directions and instructions.

8. I pray constantly for God to work. I know that by myself I can't do what God wants me to do. His plans are way beyond my ability or gifting. I know that the power comes from him. I find myself praying all the time because I need him. I can't do it alone.

9. I keep talking about God and what he is doing. As I see God at work around me I get excited about his grace and power and I want to tell others. I want those I influence to see how incredible Jesus is, because he is!

It all sounds too good to be true. GRACE is so good and so true. But in our human brokenness, we keep moving away from resting in and relying on God's grace towards focusing on our own ability and effort. Our growth in Christian influence requires a constant returning to GRACE as our foundation.

Biblical leaders emphasising GRACE

I will finish this section with a few statements from New Testament leaders. These statements show that these leaders were passionate about GRACE as they sought to influence others.

Christian influence requires constant returning to grace as our foundation.

John: *If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness. (1 John 1:8-9)*

James: *Come near to God and he will come near to you. Wash your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded. Grieve, mourn and wail. Change your laughter to mourning and your joy to gloom. Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will lift you up. (Jam. 4:8-10)*

John the Baptist: *The bride belongs to the bridegroom. The friend who attends the bridegroom waits and listens for him, and is full of joy when he hears the bridegroom's voice. That joy is mine, and it is now complete. He must become greater; I must become less. (John 3:29-30)*

Paul: *When I came to you I didn't come with eloquence or superior wisdom as I proclaimed to you the testimony about God... I came to you in weakness and fear, and with much trembling. My message and my preaching were not with wise and persuasive words, but with a demonstration of the Spirit's power, so that your faith might not rest on the wisdom of people, but on God's power. (1 Cor. 2:1-5)*

Paul: *Therefore I glory in Christ Jesus in my service to God. I will not venture to speak of anything except what Christ has accomplished through me in leading the Gentiles to obey God. (Rom. 15:17-18)*

Paul: But the Lord said to me, 'My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.' Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weakness, so that Christ's power may rest on me. (2 Cor. 12:9)

Peter: *Humble yourselves, therefore, under God's mighty hand, that he may lift you up in due time. Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you. (1 Pet. 5:6-7)*

You can see that the New Testament leaders and writers were passionate about GRACE. They admitted that they were broken. They knew that God's favour came freely on their lives and ministries; that influence was a gift of God and did not need to be earned or guarded. They desperately wanted Jesus to be the centre of attention, not their achievements or gifts or personality. They deeply relied on Jesus.

JOURNAL ACTIVITY 1.3

Go through the signs that you are GRACE-based and discuss one that is quite true of you and one that still needs some growth.

The background image shows three wooden crosses standing on a grassy hill. In the background, there is a large body of water, possibly a lake or a wide river, surrounded by a hazy, mountainous landscape. The overall color palette is a mix of greens, blues, and greys, with a slightly desaturated or teal tint.

study 4

How are followers served by GRACE?

We have established the biblical call to grasp and live in GRACE as we follow Jesus and influence others. GRACE makes a huge difference to the way we interact with God and the way we see ourselves and our influence. But the call to influence is not just a call to follow Jesus but also a call to serve others. How does our reliance on GRACE impact the way we serve those we are seeking to influence?

The impact of living GRACE

When our influence is based on following and depending on Jesus and having a passion for GRACE, those we influence will inevitably see something of God's GRACE in our lives. It shows

in our security, our peace, our freedom, our honesty, our vulnerability and our humility. There is a sweet fragrance of grace and life flowing from us. In describing his own influence, Paul writes:

"But thanks be to God, who always leads us as captives in Christ's triumphal procession and uses us to spread the aroma of the knowledge of him everywhere" (2 Cor. 2:14).

I love the thought of "the aroma of grace." The wonder and beauty of GRACE seeps into our very being. It enriches and empowers our life and influence. It smells sweet. We are not trying to prove ourselves or achieve great success, but to follow and honour Jesus. Through God's grace, we join him on an adventure that is costly, but so fulfilling. Our sense of peace, humility and purpose is on display for all to see.

Many will be powerfully influenced by God's grace flowing through our lives. Ultimately, they will see that we are not just developing a program or increasing our sphere of influence or improving the bottom line, we're seeking to follow Jesus and live in his GRACE. However, this will not appeal to everyone. Paul adds: **"For we are to God the pleasing aroma of Christ among those who are being saved and those who are perishing. To the one we are an aroma that brings death; to the other, an aroma that brings life"** (2 Cor. 2:15-16).

We are not trying to prove ourselves or achieve great success, but to follow Jesus.

Our call is to similarly sacrifice our lives by offering undeserved favour to others.

Sharing GRACE

GRACE is not only something we receive and live in, but is also something that we give. We have received freely from God through the grace-fuelled sacrifice of Jesus. Paul says, **“For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, so that you through his poverty might become rich”** (2 Cor. 8:9).

Grace is not only something we receive and live in, but is also something that we give.

Our call is to similarly sacrifice our lives by offering undeserved favour to others. **As we have received so freely from God, so we freely give of ourselves for the benefit of others.** We treat those we influence with the same grace that we have received. Jesus told his disciples, **“As you go, proclaim this message: ‘The kingdom of heaven has come near.’ Heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse those who have leprosy, drive out demons. Freely you have received; freely give”** (Matt. 10:7-8).

As GRACE fills our life, we naturally offer GRACE to others. Peter says in his first letter **“Each of you should use whatever gift you have received to serve others as faithful stewards of God’s grace in its various forms”** (1 Pet. 4:10). Our primary goal is that the grace of God might transform the lives of those we influence.

Our sharing GRACE will show in our day by day actions and attitudes towards others. For example, Paul counsels the Colossians:

“Be wise in the way you act toward outsiders; make the most of every opportunity. Let your conversation be always full of grace, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how to answer everyone” (Col. 4:5-6).

Grace actions and attitudes flow from what we have received, not from our own effort.

Grace actions and attitudes flow from what we have received, not from our own effort. In other words, the more we appreciate God’s grace, the more naturally we will share his grace with others. It’s not a matter of working harder to show GRACE, but of living close to God and depending on him so that his grace fills our lives.

Here is a list of grace actions and attitudes towards others. This list is not as a catalogue of grace characteristics to develop, but it outlines some signs of God's grace flowing through our lives to those we influence.

1. We get off our pedestal. Because we recognise our own brokenness, we don't need to hide our faults and weaknesses. We can be authentic, admit failure, and ask for forgiveness from others. We influence primarily as a fellow-traveller, not as an authority or expert. We don't have to be right or impressive. That is God's role.

2. We accept the brokenness of others. We know that others will fail like we do and we accept this and offer forgiveness. Sometimes we will need to deal appropriately with this failure, but we are not repulsed or surprised by it because we know our own weaknesses so well.

3. We treat those we influence better than they deserve. As we have received God's grace so we offer it to others. We believe in those who can't see their potential. We value those who seem weak. We are bighearted towards those who seem broken or unworthy. We are patient and kind towards those who are difficult. We defend those who have hurt us. We look for the best in others.

4. We are generous in the use of our resources. Because we recognise that everything good we have comes from God's gracious hand, we freely give to those in need. This can range from small things like a word of encouragement or assistance with a problem to major financial sacrifices.

5. We care about people. I'll say much more about this in the next biblical leadership passion (LOVE), but I need to mention it here, because God's gracious care for us produces a deeper concern for others.

6. We are humble. We recognise that any success we have comes from the hand of God, so we are not quick to claim it for ourselves. We don't seek attention or glory. We are glad to see others honoured, and are especially thankful when Jesus gets the glory.

We recognise that any success we have comes from the hand of God. We don't seek attention or glory.

7. We bring reconciliation. We know that we have been reconciled with God and others by what Jesus has done, so we naturally become agents of reconciliation. We believe that God wants people to work together in love and unity and we seek to enable this.

8. We pray for others, and with others when appropriate. Recognising that our part in God's work often centres around prayer, we pray about everything. We tell people that we are praying for them and sometimes we stop to pray with them.

9. We talk about Jesus where possible. We desperately want people to see how good and powerful Jesus is and want to tell others about him when it's appropriate. We unashamedly share

the good news of Jesus when it's possible. We want others to know the grace and freedom that we have found in Jesus.

If we are seeking to influence those who are not yet Christians, there is an evangelistic element to our sharing GRACE. We certainly want them to grow and develop as people as they see God's grace flowing through our lives, but ultimately, we long for them to receive the grace of Jesus personally. Paul says: **"To the weak I became weak, to win the weak. I have become all things to all people so that by all possible means I might save some" (2 Cor. 9:22).**

Of course, we often get these things wrong. It's easy to move away from GRACE and find that the hard, competitive, fearful, defensive, unforgiving, demanding, pride-filled side of our broken nature comes to the fore. This is when we can damage those we are seeking to influence. But we say sorry and receive God's undeserved mercy again so that GRACE fills us once more. **Our growth in GRACE is a lifetime journey.**

JOURNAL ACTIVITY 1.4

What signs of God's grace can you see already flowing through the way you relate to (and influence) others? The list on the previous page may help you with ideas. Thank God for these signs of his grace through you.

A scenic landscape featuring three wooden crosses standing on a grassy hill. In the background, a large, calm lake stretches across the valley, with rolling hills and mountains visible under a clear sky. The overall color palette is dominated by greens and blues, with a soft, hazy atmosphere.

study 5

How GRACE serves followers - freedom and flourishing

God's grace is an incredible gift to offer those we influence. As we treat people with grace and create grace environments people find freedom to be real and honest and open. They can admit their mistakes. They can be themselves. They no longer have to protect themselves and their reputation because they know they will be treated with grace. In relationships, we can waste so much time and energy in self-defence and second-guessing and trying to control situations. Grace sets us free from the need for pretence and manipulation.

I have a special relationship with my brother. He knows me very well, including all my weaknesses. After all, he grew up with me, so there are no secrets. But deeply secure in God's grace himself, he treats me with grace. He accepts me with my flaws. He believes in me more than I believe in myself. He cheers me on. He is generous towards me. He writes me regular notes of encouragement. I know that I am safe with him. I don't have to prove myself. I don't have to pretend. I don't have to win his approval or avoid his criticism. I already have his favour. I know that he is for me. Oh he will gently challenge me, even correct me, when he feels I'm insensitive to people or disobedient to God. But our relationship is saturated with grace, and this is incredibly freeing for me. I love being with him. I appreciate his feedback. I am strengthened by the relationship.

And the freedom of GRACE allows those we influence to flourish. When our defences come down through the freedom of grace, we can enter fully into relationships, we can offer our best work, we can have fun, we can feel safe in conflict, we can handle disappointment. We can flourish.

The following quotes from Scripture outline the freedom and flourishing that belong to those who live in God's grace:

Now a slave has no permanent place in the family, but a son belongs to it forever. So if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed. (John 8:35-36)

What, then, shall we say in response to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us? He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all—how will

he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things? (Rom. 8:31-32)

I am the gate; whoever enters through me will be saved. They will come in and go out, and find pasture. The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full. (John 10:9-10)

As our followers live with GRACE (whether that is God's grace or, to a lesser degree, the grace of our influence), they thrive. When they know that they are forgiven and accepted because of who they are, not what they do, and when they are blessed by the undeserved favour of those whom they follow, they experience freedom and flourishing.

While we can't offer GRACE like God does, as God's grace flows through our lives and we treat followers with grace, they will find the freedom to be the person God designed them to be and they will flourish knowing that they are accepted and supported despite their weaknesses.

We need our followers to know they are accepted because of who they are, not what they do.

This is where Christian influence starts – letting God's grace pervade our lives so that those around us experience GRACE. As they enjoy freedom and flourishing, they may be more willing to listen to us and follow us. GRACE is very attractive. It's such an important passion in serving others.

GRACE belongs in the Operating System of Christians of influence. I hope you can see how foundational it is. This is where we start as we seek to influence others. If we don't nail GRACE, we end up thinking that influence is all about achieving things for God and/or meeting our needs, rather than being invited undeservedly to join God in his powerful work.

My personal reflection

The wonder of God's grace never ceases to amaze me. I love writing about it. I completely believe everything that I have covered above. To think that Jesus not only loved me so much that he called me into his family with all its incredible benefits, but that he has also given me opportunity to influence others, despite my weakness and brokenness. This is amazing grace. I have been graciously given the opportunity to join God in bringing the new life of his kingdom. Wow.

I wish I could say that GRACE has always been the foundation and heart of my leadership, but this is not the case. I have had significant battles with disappointment, fear and anxiety, and at times I felt solely responsible for the ministries I led. This has caused me some anguish over the years and at times has lessened the effectiveness of my leadership. None of these problems would have emerged if I had held tightly on to GRACE. So, I too am a work in progress.

But I'm growing. I am resting more in God's grace than ever before, and consequently am more able to treat followers with grace. As much as I can, I meditate and speak on GRACE so that this

foundational biblical passion settles more deeply within me.

As I read Christian and secular articles on leadership, I find little mention of GRACE. But many of the results of GRACE that I have discussed this week like giving followers freedom and helping them flourish are prevalent in the leadership literature. It must be so hard to do this without a solid foundation in the grace of God. No wonder secular leaders find it challenging to maintain a gracious approach in what is often a predominantly self-centred environment.

On the other hand, Christian influence at its best is saturated with GRACE. We have such a big head start when it comes to building healthy environments that enable freedom and flourishing, because we have already experienced GRACE ourselves. We know what it's like.

JOURNAL ACTIVITY 1.5

Checkpoint 1: GRACE

TOTAL:

Please rate each statement on the following scale:

5 - Strongly Agree;

4 - Agree;

3 - Neither Agree nor Disagree;

2 - Disagree;

1 - Strongly Disagree

TOTAL the scores for each quality and put the total in the box.

This gives a score out of 25. A score below 20 indicates significant room for growth.

1. **I am a continually thankful person because I know God has treated me with great grace.**
2. **I am aware of my own weakness and sin and admit it to others and seek God's forgiveness.**
3. **I pray often for God's direction and help because I know how much I need him and depend on him.**
4. **I try to humbly follow and honour Jesus in the things I do to serve others.**
5. **I find that people flourish around me as they enjoy the grace and acceptance I offer them.**

Comment on the implications of your score and what you have personally learned about GRACE.



Discussion Questions: GRACE

Choose the most appropriate questions.

- 1.** What issues have the readings and journaling raised for you? Share your thoughts and questions.
- 2.** Share your response to Journal Activity 1.5.
- 3.** How can we know that God has called us to influence? How do you know? Who are you seeking to influence at the moment?
- 4.** Do you find it easy or difficult to really depend on God? Why do you think this is the case?
- 5.** Think of a leader who has shared God's grace with you. How did they do this?
- 6.** How are you growing your intimacy with Jesus? Did you hear God say anything this week about growing your relationship with him?
- 7.** Why does God allow pruning and/or spiritual dryness? What can this do for our relationship with God?
- 8.** What do you think is the main barrier limiting our offering of God's grace to those we influence? What can be done about this?
- 9.** In what ways can we offer God's grace to people we influence outside church contexts? (Col. 4:6)



Case Studies: GRACE

Choose the most relevant case studies to discuss.

- 1.** Kate is the sort of girl that everyone likes. She is capable and charismatic and is a natural youth leader. After 18 months as the main youth leader in her church, she has grown the Friday night youth group from 15 to about 50. There is plenty of pressure but she works hard and the kids love her. One Friday night after a discouraging youth program when only 20 turned up, Kate suddenly decided that she didn't want to lead the youth ministry anymore. She felt that she had nothing more to give. That it was all too hard. But she doesn't want to let people down, so she comes to you (her friend) to talk it over. In the light of this study, what issues would you raise with her?
- 2.** Zac has started a job as an apprentice plumber. He gets most of the dirtiest jobs, but that doesn't really worry him. What does worry him is the amount of swearing, crude conversation and critical comments between the guys. He feels called by God to this job and wants to be an influence and to bring God's grace, but he has no idea what he can do in such a seemingly godless environment. Any suggestions?
- 3.** As young adult coordinator, you have three others in your leadership team. One of the team comes to you and mentions that another of the team is criticising your leadership to the young adults involved in the ministry. This team member apparently doesn't like your shifting the ministry from a social orientated program to a more intentional discipleship strategy, but he has not spoken to you about it. How do you respond in grace?
- 4.** You have worked really hard and you are at last seeing momentum developing in the kids' club in which you serve. It's a time of exciting growth. One of the non-Christian parents comes up to you and tells you that you are doing a fabulous job and that her child just adores you. How do you respond in the light of God's grace?
- 5.** As worship coordinator at your church, you fully believe that prayer is important. But by the time you organise the teams, get the music ready, liaise with the service leader, coordinate the practices, and deal with all the little problems, you just don't have time to pray much about what you're doing. Things are going well and everyone says that you are doing a good job. You certainly pray with the teams before the services. Does this lack of prayer really matter? What (if any) are likely to be the repercussions?