



Grace & Truth

HOW DID JESUS LOVE?

DAY 1 - GRACE & TRUTH

Read John 1:14

We need to be grace people and truth people. Not half grace and half truth. Not all grace on Mondays and all truth on Tuesdays. All grace and all truth all the time. By personality and upbringing and a whole bunch of other factors most of us lean in one direction or the other.

Grace people are pleasant to be around. They don't ruffle any feathers. They cut us a lot of slack. They're easy going. They accept us for who we are. They don't make demands. They are always welcoming. But without truth, grace isn't really grace, it's just being accepting and nice. But affirmation and being grace-filled are not the same thing. Grace people without truth are pleasant to be around, but we wonder if they really like us or if they are just trying to be liked. They are tolerant, but they often do not know the difference between right and wrong. Or they don't care to line up one way or the other. Grace people can be cowardly. They often refuse to make tough decisions in life. They demand nothing from others and get nothing in return. They accept us for who we are, but they never help us become who we should be.

And then there are truth people. Truth people are easy to admire. They have convictions and principles. They believe in right and wrong. They set standards. They speak out against injustice, oppression, and evil. They are articulate and well-spoken. But without grace, telling the truth can become an excuse for belligerence. Truth people without grace are loyal to their cause, but we wonder if they are really loyal to us. They want to change us and make us better, but they don't allow for mistakes. They are quick to cast judgment on others. They make difficult decisions, but they also make life difficult for others and for themselves. They can be slow to forgive. They inspire us with their courage, but turn us off with their intimidation.

If you are a grace person you are most concerned about being loved. If you are a truth person you are most concerned about being right even it means being unloved. Both have their dangers. Something is wrong if everyone hates you, and something is probably just as wrong if everyone loves you.

Jesus was all grace. He welcomed sinners and tax collectors and ate with them. He had compassion on the crowds when they were hungry and far from home. He welcomed the little children to come and sit on his lap-gentler and kinder than any department store Santa. He healed the lepers, the lame, and the blind. He saved the criminal on the cross, who, in his dying breath, confessed that the dying man next to him was truly the Son of God.

And Jesus was all truth. He condemned many of the religious leaders of his day for being liars and hypocrites. He talked about hell more than he talked about heaven.

He called all his those who would be his disciples to take up their cross daily and follow him. He prophesied judgment on Jerusalem for their unrepentant hearts. He obeyed the law, set standards, and demanded everything from his followers, even their very lives. Jesus came from the Father full of grace and truth. All grace, all truth, all the time.

But he didn't come simply to give us an example of grace and truth. He came to save us in grace and truth. It's only after we've been saved and made right with God, the God says, "Alright, now that I have saved through Jesus, you need to know that I have saved you to look like Jesus." The motivation to be full of grace and truth is not because we need to earn God's favor, but because being a follower of Jesus Christ, means we look like the one we follow.

We desperately need grace in our lives. We need to hear from Jesus "Come to me, all you who are weary and heavy-laden and I will give you rest" (Matt. 11:28) We need to know that God doesn't expect us to clean up our act before we come to him. He implores us to come, now, today, just as we are—in brokenness, in pain, in humility, in repentance, and in faith. We need to hear that wayward children, who have squandered their inheritance and lived an immoral, rebellious life, can come home into the arms of their heavenly Father (Luke 15:20).

And we desperately need truth in our lives. We need to hear from Jesus "the truth will set you free" (John 8:32). And we need to hear from Jesus what this saying really means: "I tell you the truth, everyone who sins is a slave to sin...But if the Son sets you free you will be free indeed" (John 8:36). We need someone as gracious as Jesus to tell us the truth: you are not okay. You do not need to push away those feelings of guilt that weigh you down. You are guilty. And anyone who tells you otherwise, is not telling you the truth. And because they won't tell you the truth, you won't experience the grace you need.

We need truth. We need grace. We need Jesus. Only Jesus Christ lived in perfect grace and perfect truth. Only Jesus Christ can save hard-hearted, hard-headed sinners full of lies and deserving judgment. And only by union with Jesus Christ, can we grow in the same truth and grace that walked among us in the miracle of the incarnation.

This devotional is an article written by Kevin DeYoung for The Gospel Coalition website

1. What type of person are you? Do you tend to love in grace or love in truth?
2. Which form of love do you respond best to, truth or grace?

DAY 2 - UNDERSTANDING GRACE

Read Lamentations 3:22-24

Having children is one of the quickest ways for a person to begin to understand grace. I know many of you that are reading this are probably rolling your eyes right now because you are a teenager living in your parent's home. I can honestly say though I have learned more about grace from my children than anywhere else in life. Each day they do something that many times I have asked them hundreds if not thousands of times not to do. Or they don't do something that I have repeatedly asked them to do. Don't leave your clothes on the floor. Don't fight with your sister. Take a shower. Brush your teeth. Wash the dishes. The list could go on and on. What I've begun to realize though is that I am not much different as a child of God. Each day I do things that He doesn't want me to do and each day I don't do things that He does want me to do. Regardless of how bad I fail each day, God still shows me grace even when I don't deserve it.

It's hard to wrap our minds around the grace of God. We don't live in a world where grace is really practiced or even valued. As a result we don't often expect to receive grace, not from the people around us and certainly not from a holy and perfect God. We may look at ourselves and think how stupid, weak, and narrow minded we seem to God. How many times do we fail in the same areas? We can't hide who we are and it's ridiculous to think we can somehow put on a front for God. He created us and knows exactly how our minds and hearts work. "For he knows what we are made of; he realizes we are made of clay" (Psalm 103:14).

In some ways we're right to think of ourselves as unworthy of God's grace. We are sinful and we do mess up again and again. Truthfully, humanity is a mess. But Psalm 103:13 brings a refreshing perspective to the reminder God's grace. It reads, "As a father has compassion on his children, so the Lord has compassion on his faithful followers." We aren't deserving of God's love, but he lavishes it on us anyway. It's not because of who we are, but because of who He is.

Knowing even the darkest corners of our hearts, God loves us so much that he was willing to die for us. And for those who chose to follow Him, He sends his Holy Spirit to indwell us. He doesn't turn away from our mess; He lives in it. And He is lovingly waiting to help us clean it up.

1. In a world so absent of grace, what are some practical and specific ways you can extend the grace you've freely received to others?
2. What are some ways you have been shown grace by others in your life? How have you been shown grace by God?

DAY 3 - TOUGH LOVE

Read Galatians 3:1, 3

When I was in college I was fortunate enough to have a mentor in my faith named Dustin. Dustin was a great guy that really cared about me and my spiritual growth. I can remember many nights just sitting around with him and his wife, Laurie Ann, and just learning so much from them about how to grow and mature in my faith. The thing that I admired most about Dustin and Laurie Ann was that they were not afraid to confront me when I was doing wrong. I remember this one time in particular where I was stuck in this pattern of sin that was just causing me to struggle. I went over to Dustin's house one night and told him, "Man, I've screwed up again." I was thinking he was going to tell me it's going to be ok and to just keep praying for victory over it, but what happened next took me by surprise. He began to come down hard on me with truth, calling me out for the sin that was present in my life. Basically, he was tired of the excuses I was giving and tired of me living the way I was.

We seen in his letter to the Galatians that Paul was this same was with the believers in the church at Galatia. Paul had started this church during one of his missionary journeys and had seen it grow and flourish early on. Since he had left though, the believers there began to struggle in their faith and were turning away from the Gospel they had heard preached from Paul. They had listened to all the false teachers that were teaching a works based faith and they had begun to substitute a works based faith for the simple faith in believing in the work of Jesus Christ on the cross. Loving this group of people dearly, this news of what was happening in the church moved Paul to write this letter to them. This is a harsh letter at some points. Paul calls them foolish and doesn't mince words when showing them their sin.

Here is the thing that Dustin in my life and Paul in the life of the Galatians had in common. They were not afraid to share tough love with the people they cared about. Tough love can be hard to receive sometimes because it makes us confront the reality of the situation. Tough love can also be tough to give as it forces us to say hard things to people we care about. Either way, we must be people willing to receive tough love and people willing to give tough love. Grace is important and we must always show grace, but in the process of showing grace, we can not neglect truth. Jesus was able to perfectly love in grace and in truth. He was able to call sin sin, then go to the cross and pay for that sin. Having payed for our sin, He was able to show Grace by not condemning us. Then He was able to command us to leave our life of sin. Let's be people that show love and receive love in grace in truth!

1. Have you ever had someone that loved you call you out for a sin pattern in your life? How did that make you feel?
2. Have you ever called someone out for a sin pattern in their life? How did that situation turn out?

DAY 4 - GO AND SIN NO MORE

Read John 8:10-11

When I was little (7 or 8 years old), I had a friend named Bjorn. Yep, that's his real name. His parents were real big tennis players and they named him after the famous tennis star, Bjorn Borg. Bjorn and I were always outside doing something. Whether we were playing basketball, baseball, or building a fort, you could always find us outside. One day we were playing in a dried up creek in his front yard. We were just exploring, throwing rocks, and goofing off. Bjorn was standing by a big tree and I had what I thought was a bright idea. I picked up a big rock and I was going to throw the rock at the tree above him and scare him. As you can tell, I didn't think this through to much, because even if I did hit the tree, the rock would just fall down and hit him. Regardless I was young and dumb and decided to chuck it. Unfortunately the rock was a little heavier than I first thought and when I threw it, it didn't quite take the trajectory that I thought it would. Bam! I hit Bjorn right in the head with that rock. He was crying, blood was going everywhere, and we both ran into the house to get his mom.

Two hours and 37 stitches later, Bjorn's head finally stopped bleeding. In the middle of rushing to the hospital and all the craziness, Bjorn nor his mom had a moment to just sit and talk to me about what I had done. I can remember on that car ride home, I was so nervous. They are going to hate me I thought. So you can imagine my shock when they both forgave me. I was stunned! I just kept thinking I was going to be in huge trouble, but they chose to simply forgive me. I can remember getting back to his house and as we were getting ready to go back outside his mom looked at both of us and said, "Have you learned your lesson? No more throwing rocks. She had showed me grace in forgiving me, but she also showed me truth in revealing how dumb my actions were.

Jesus excelled at this. In this story in John 8, the Pharisees brought a woman to Jesus that had been caught in adultery. At that time, the law required that a woman caught in adultery must be stoned to death. See, the Pharisees were trying to trick Jesus. They wanted to put him between a rock and hard place, let the woman live and go against the law, or let her die. The Pharisees asked Jesus "What do you say." Jesus answered their question with this beautiful response, "he who is without sin, throw the first stone." Jesus knew that even the high and mighty Pharisees knew that they were without sin. As the Pharisees dropped their stones and walked away one by one. Jesus looked up and asked the woman, "Has no one condemned you?" And she said "no one." The next phrase out of Jesus mouth is this beautiful picture of truth and grace that shows how He loves His children. Jesus looked at the woman and said "Then neither do I condemn you," Jesus declared. "Go now and leave your life of sin." Do you see what Jesus did there? He chose to show her grace in not condemning her, but he also told her truth by telling her to go and sin no more. He was making sure that the woman knew she had sinned, but also that He was forgiving her.

Regardless of what we have done, God is ready and willing to show us grace. With that being said, we must also understand that He will also point us towards truth. He loves us just the way we are, but He wants us to move past who we are so that we can become more like Him.

DAY 5 - THE SALT OF THE WORLD

Read Matthew 5:13

Salt was important in the time of Jesus. It was used to season food, to bring out its best, and to preserve meat and fish from decaying and becoming rotten. Jesus tells us in this passage that people who follow him should be like salt, bringing out the best in others and keeping the good in this world from becoming spoiled and rotten. The table salt we use in our homes is a combination of two elements: sodium and chlorine (NaCl). Sodium is never found alone in nature; it is always connected with another element. Its "gregarious" nature is evidenced by the fact that there are over 200 sodium compounds. You might say that it's willing to accept just about anything that's out there. Chlorine, of course, is the gas that gives bleach its pungent odor. It's a powerful disinfectant, but you have to be careful with it. If misused, chlorine can be poisonous and destructive.

Grace is like sodium. Its nature is to reach out and receive. As long as grace is embracing people, it's similar to what we see in Jesus. But often in the name of grace, just about anything is accepted, including beliefs that contradict what the Scriptures reveal as the mind of God and behaviors that oppose his will. Truth is more like chlorine. It's a cleansing agent, and there are times when we need to use it to "clean up" our thinking. But by itself, truth can be offensive and difficult to be around. If we're going to be salt, if we're going to make this world a better place as Jesus said we should, then we need to possess both grace and truth just as Jesus did. We must have compassion for people and passion for truth, not one instead of the other or one more than the other, but both together in equal measure.

Balancing grace and truth isn't easy. It's like walking a tightrope, holding onto a long pole to help you keep your balance. To keep our balance, we hold onto the gospel like an aerialist holding onto a balance pole. On the one side there is grace. On the other is truth. Let the pole tip too much one way or the other, and we'll lose our balance. Lean either way too strongly, and we'll fall off. It's only as we hold the pole in balance that we can walk the way that Jesus walked, live the way that he lived, and impact our world in a way that is truly transformative.

If you take time to think, you probably have people in your life that need a large dose of grace in their life and you probably know others that simply need to hear truth. Take some moments to think about these people and then pray for each one of them by name. Ask God how He can use you to be the salt of the Earth in their lives this week and going forward.

DAY 6 - REFLECTION

What has God been teaching you this week about walking in Grace & Truth and how to love like Jesus did?

GRACE DAY

Sometimes things happen during our week that prevent us from spending time with God the way we want to. There is absolutely grace for those moments, so take today to catch up on a missed reading, time for prayer, or resting in His grace.