



FAMILY CONNECTIONS

Find time to explore these questions as a family after each session.

Session 1

- Why might someone ask the question *What is grace?*
- What issues or other questions are at the heart of this question?
- What does *grace* signify when used to describe God's character? God's actions?

Session 2

- What times do you recall where you have been forgiven?
- Who has been the most forgiving person in your life?
- Is it hard for you to forgive?
- Is there anything you find unforgivable?
- Is there anything God finds unforgivable?

Session 3

- Who is a harder judge of you—others or yourself?
- To whom is it hardest to extend grace?
- How willing are you to play a role in extending God's grace to others?

Session 4

- Have you ever received a gift that was so overpoweringly good and gracious that you had to give in return? If so, what was it and what did you do?
- Invite family members to echo your threefold reading of the phrase, emphasizing the italicized words. Repeat several times:

There's nothing *you* have to do.
There's nothing you *have* to do.
There's nothing you have to *do*.

Pray: O God, give us assurance that your grace is all we need to be acceptable in your sight. Help us to live grateful lives. Amen.



IMAGES OF GOD'S GRACE

Read the passages below and determine what the word images tell you about God's character and gifts to us. Note: The word for *grace* is also translated as "favor" and "good."

Genesis 1:1–2:3
Genesis 6:8
Genesis 32:5
Ezra 9:8
Jeremiah 31:2
Zechariah 11:7, 14
Luke 1:26–39
Acts 4:32–33
Ephesians 1:8

Based on the passages, how would you describe God's gracious character and actions? What responses are evoked in you when you consider our gracious God?





GOD'S GRACE THROUGH JESUS CHRIST

The Word became flesh and made his home among us.
We have seen his glory, glory like that of a father's only son,
full of grace and truth.

John testified about him, crying out, "This is the one of whom I said, 'He who comes after me is greater than me because he existed before me.'"

From his fullness we have all received grace upon grace; as the Law was given through Moses, so grace and truth came into being through Jesus Christ.

—John 1:14–17 (CEB)

We know that God works all things together for good for the ones who love God, for those who are called according to his purpose.

Who will separate us from Christ's love? Will we be separated by trouble, or distress, or harassment, or famine, or nakedness, or danger, or sword?

But in all these things we win a sweeping victory through the one who loved us. I'm convinced that nothing can separate us from God's love in Christ

Jesus our Lord: not death or life, not angels or rulers, not present things or future things, not powers or height or depth, or any other thing that is created.

—Romans 8:28, 35, 37–39 (CEB)

Discuss:

If these were the only passages in the Bible, what would we know about God's grace?

What does the Scripture mean when it says the Word, Jesus, was "full of grace"? What is "grace upon grace"?

In the John reading above, replace the word *grace* with *favor*, *forgiveness*, *love*, *beauty*, and *kindness*. Which synonym helps you better understand the concept of God's grace?

Even though the Romans 8 passage does not include the word *grace*, how does it help define God's grace as gift? As quality of life?



GRACE SEEK AND FIND

From Jesus we have
all received grace
upon grace.
—John 1:16 (Common English Bible)

From Jesus we have
all received grace
upon grace.
—John 1:16 (Common English Bible)

From Jesus we have
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STUDY CATECHISM QUESTION 1

Q. 1. What is God's purpose for your life?

God wills that I should live by the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, for the love of God, and in the communion of the Holy Spirit.

FAiTh

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FAiTh



WE NEED GOD'S GRACE

Part 1

Wise and virtuous men and women through the ages have sought the highest good in devotion to freedom, justice, peace, truth, and beauty.

Part 2

Yet all human virtue, when seen in the light of God's love in Jesus Christ, is found to be infected by self-interest and hostility.

Part 3

All people, good and bad alike, are in the wrong before God and helpless without God's forgiveness.

Part 4

Thus everyone falls under God's judgment. No one is more subject to that judgment than those who assume that they are guiltless before God or morally superior to others.

—Confession of 1967, Inclusive Language Text (9.13)



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CERTIFICATE OF ACHIEVEMENT

_____ is awarded this certificate for amazing work on:



PHARISEES AND TAX COLLECTORS

PHARISEES

The Pharisees were Jews who believed that strict obedience to the Law of Moses was the best way to be faithful to God. (These laws are found in the books of Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy.) They worked hard to obey the laws about clothing, food, worship, and personal behavior because they knew these laws marked Israel as set apart by God for the special task of being a light to the nations.

Pharisees were respected leaders of the Jewish community and teachers of the Law of Moses. Some served on the Sanhedrin, the ruling council. Many Pharisees were offended when Jesus said he was God's Son. Many did not approve of the way Jesus healed people on the Sabbath or of his association with people who did not live according to the Law of Moses.

What else can you learn about Jesus and Pharisees?

Luke 11:37-43: _____

Luke 13:31: _____

John 3:1-2: _____

John 11:45-48: _____

TAX COLLECTORS

In Jesus' day, the tax collectors were Jews who worked for the Roman Empire, collecting the taxes that Rome forced the Jewish citizens to pay. They earned their living by collecting more money than the taxes that were owed and keeping the difference as their salary.

Other Jews despised the tax collectors because they worked for the Romans, who had conquered Israel and were considered the enemy. Some Jews thought the tax collectors took too much money for their salary. Many Pharisees were appalled that Jesus associated with tax collectors.

What else can you learn about Jesus and tax collectors?

Matthew 9:9-10: _____

Luke 15:1: _____



SINNERS, PHARISEES, AND DINNER PARTIES

ABOUT SINNERS

Jewish Law consisted of 613 commandments, all of which had to be obeyed. Anyone who broke the law was considered unclean or unacceptable to God until he or she went through the required cleansing ceremonies. Someone whose lifestyle went against God's law would be considered a sinner and would be judged as unworthy of God's love. Anyone who came into physical contact with a sinner would be judged and found wanting by association. Only God could forgive sin.



ABOUT PHARISEES

Pharisees believed people gained God's favor by following the Jewish Law. They studied the law for many years to learn how to live in a way that made them acceptable to God. The law said that anyone who encountered a sinner was unacceptable to God. Therefore, they would avoid contact with anyone who was considered a sinner.



DINNER PARTY ETIQUETTE

In the time of Jesus, hospitality was regarded as a sacred duty. It was customary to greet guests with a kiss of welcome, anoint their heads with olive oil, and provide water for them to wash their feet. Failure to do these things was not only bad manners, it was also an indication that you looked down on someone. On special occasions, the Jewish people often followed the Greek and Roman custom of lying on their left side and leaning on their left elbow, while eating with their right hand.



SESSION 3 FAITH STATEMENT

Question 18.

What does our creation in God's image reflect about God's love for us?

We are created to live wholeheartedly for God. When we honor our Creator as the source of all good things, we are like mirrors reflecting back the great beam of love that God shines on us. We are also created to honor God by showing love toward other human beings.

—*Study Catechism: Full Version*

Question 86. Since we are redeemed from our sin and its wretched consequences by grace through Christ without any merit of our own, why must we do good works?

Because just as Christ has redeemed us with his blood he also renews us through his Holy Spirit according to his own image, so that with our whole life we may show ourselves grateful to God for his goodness and that he may be glorified through us; and further, so that we ourselves may be assured of our faith by its fruits and by our reverent behavior may win our neighbors to Christ.

—Heidelberg Catechism



FAITH



INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

What community project are you involved with as a volunteer?

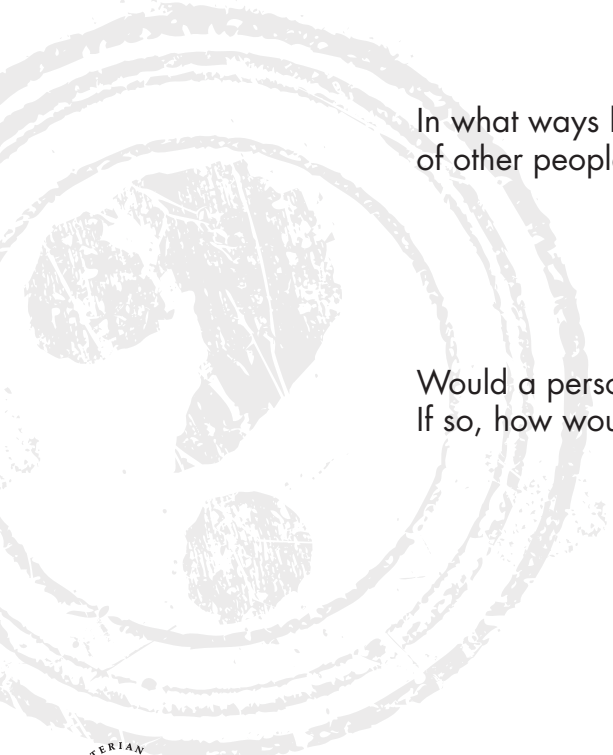


What specific tasks do you do?



How do you understand the meaning of Ephesians 2:8–10? To what degree do these verses inspire you to volunteer?

When you were my age, did you imagine that you would be serving in this way? What led you to choose to get involved?



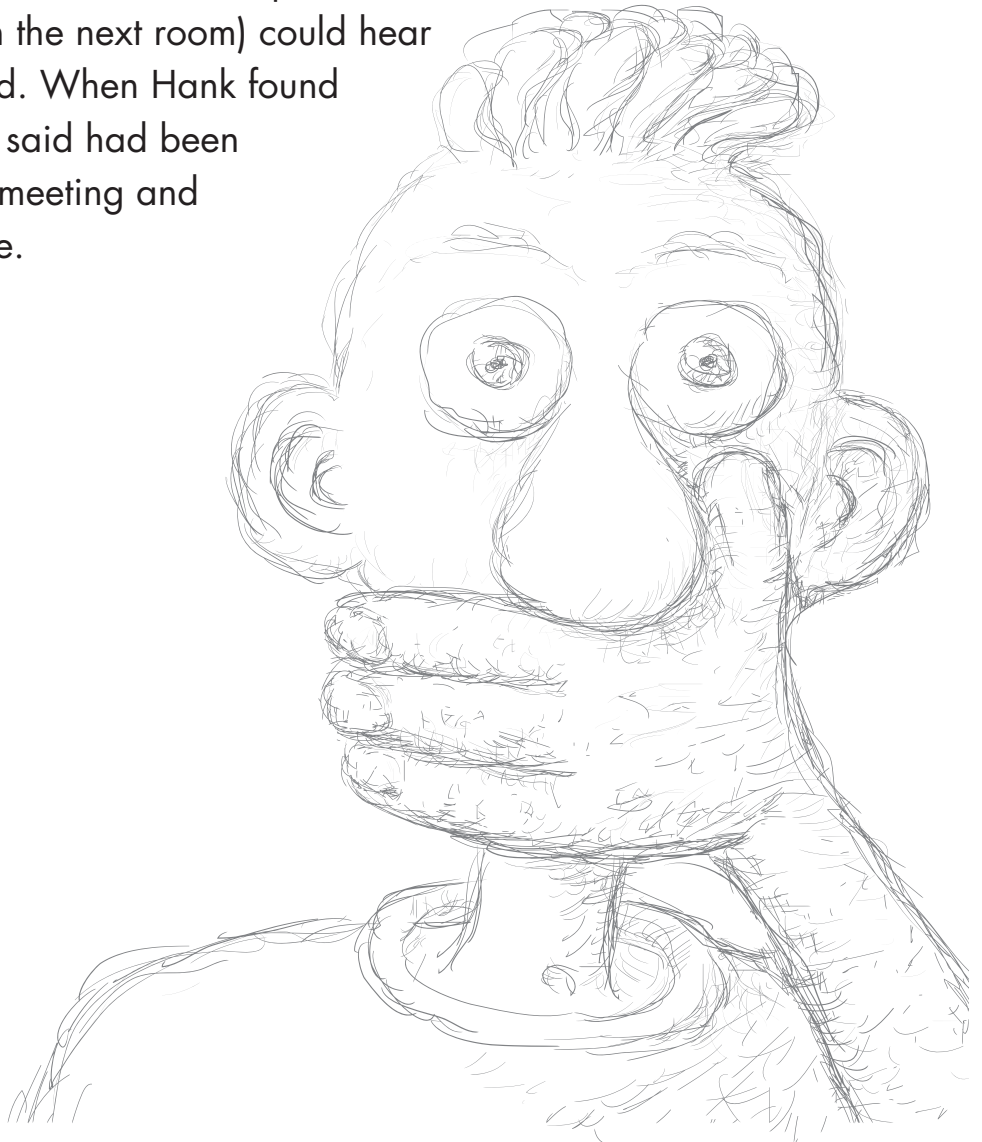
In what ways have you seen your volunteer work make a difference in the lives of other people or in God's creation?

Would a person my age be able to participate in or support this organization? If so, how would he or she get started?



TONGUE-TIED

The time had come for the annual youth retreat, and Hank had not registered. Hank had attended church regularly with his Aunt Dee, but had stopped coming about six weeks ago. At that time a new member of the group, Joe Kim, was present. Joe's mother and Hank's aunt were good friends. During that meeting, the group was rehearsing to lead worship for Youth Sunday. Hank was in one group and Joe in another. Hank started to make rude comments about Joe's language abilities until he realized that the microphone was on, and Joe (and others in the next room) could hear everything he had said. When Hank found out that everything he said had been broadcast, he left the meeting and hasn't been back since.





SESSION 4 FAITH STATEMENTS

In gratitude to God, empowered by the Spirit,
we strive to serve Christ in our daily tasks
and to live holy and joyful lives,
even as we watch for God's new heaven and new earth,
praying, "Come, Lord Jesus!"

—A Brief Statement of Faith, (Lines 72—76)

The reconciling work of Jesus was the supreme crisis
in the life of humankind.

His cross and resurrection become personal crisis and
present hope for women and men when the gospel is
proclaimed and believed.

In this experience, the Spirit brings God's forgiveness to
all, moves people to respond in faith, repentance, and
obedience, and initiates the new life in Christ.

—Confession of 1967, Inclusive Language Text, Section 9.21

FAITH





TAX COLLECTOR LEAVES HIS BOOTH TO FOLLOW JESUS

Based on Luke 5:27–32; 2 Corinthians 5:17–18

Reporter: We have breaking news for you folks! We have learned that Levi, a tax collector, left his tax collector booth to follow, of all people, Jesus! Levi is with us now. Levi, please tell us what happened!

Levi: Well, I was in my booth collecting taxes like I always do. Jesus came to my booth looking for me. I knew who he was; I had been hearing about him and had seen him around some. I had never actually had a conversation with him, though. Not many people speak to me since I'm a tax collector and everyone pretty much hates me.

Reporter: So he came to your booth and then what happened?

Levi: It was actually kind of amazing. I thought he was going to yell at me or something for doing bad things like making people pay more than they actually owed in taxes so I could, you know, make a little extra money. Instead, he told me that if I followed him, if I believed in him as the Son of God, that I could have a new life, that my sins would be forgiven and that I would know of his grace and love. He said I didn't have to earn his love, that it was a free gift to me, that he loved me even though I was a tax collector and had cheated many people out of a lot of money.

Reporter: So you just left your job, just like that?

Levi: Yes, just like that. He told me he wanted me to follow him, so I stood up right then, walked away from my job, and became a follower of Jesus.

Reporter: Then what happened?

Levi: I was so happy to be a better person, to be following Jesus, that I gave a banquet and invited some tax collectors I know and some other people, and they came to my banquet. Jesus was there. So were some of his disciples. It was great. The Pharisees were totally messed up about it. They kept asking Jesus questions like, "Why are you eating with these tax collectors and other kinds of sinners?" He kept having to tell them things like, "Tax collectors and sinners need me and the new life that I offer. I love them even though they didn't do something to earn my love."

Reporter: This is a fascinating series of events, I have to say. What final words do you have for us today, Levi?

Levi: I would like to say that if anyone is in Christ, they are a new creation: everything old has passed away; everything has become new. Seriously, if I can follow Jesus and have a new life, anyone can!

