

Series Title: When Grace Gets Grimy

Series Text: 2 Timothy 3:16-17

“All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.”

The German Theologian Dietrich Bonhoeffer, in his book *The Cost of Discipleship*, wrote, "cheap grace is the preaching of forgiveness without requiring repentance, baptism without church discipline, communion without confession, grace without discipleship, grace without the cross, grace without Jesus Christ...costly grace confronts us as a gracious call to follow Jesus, it comes as a word of forgiveness to the broken spirit and the contrite heart. It is costly because it compels a man to submit to the yoke of Christ and follow him; it is grace because Jesus says: 'My yoke is easy and my burden is light.'"

Grace is Free – Faith Needs Work

2 Peter 1:3–16

When followers of Jesus accept His gift of salvation we receive as a bonus a lifetime of transformation into the image of Jesus. When we reject the latter we often do not feel the presence of the former.

Truth must be repeated to stay fresh

2 Peter 1:12-16

“So I will always remind you of these things, even though you know them and are firmly established in the truth you now have. I think it is right to refresh your memory as long as I live in the tent of this body, because I know that I will soon put it aside, as our Lord Jesus Christ has made clear to me. And I will make every effort to see that after my departure you will always be able to remember these things. We did not follow cleverly invented stories when we told you about the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we were eyewitnesses of his majesty.”

In a CNN report this year John Blake reported that “More teens becoming 'fake' Christians.” He warns, “If you're the parent of a Christian teenager, **Kenda Creasy Dean** has this warning: Your child is following a "mutant" form of Christianity, and you may be responsible.”

Dean says more American teenagers are embracing what she calls "moralistic therapeutic deism." Translation: It's a watered-down faith that portrays God as a "divine therapist" whose chief goal is to boost people's self-esteem.

Dean is a minister, a professor at Princeton Theological Seminary and the author of **"Almost Christian,"** a new book that argues that many parents and pastors are unwittingly passing on this self-serving strain of Christianity.

She says **this "imposter" faith is one reason teenagers abandon churches.**

"If this is the God they're seeing in church, they are right to leave us in the dust," Dean says. **"Churches don't give them enough to be passionate about."**

What traits passionate teens share

National Study of Youth and Religion.

The study, which included in-depth interviews with at **least 3,300 American teenagers between 13 and 17**, found that most American teens who called themselves Christian were indifferent and inarticulate about their faith.

The study included Christians of all stripes -- from Catholics to Protestants of both conservative and liberal denominations. Though **three out of four American teenagers claim to be Christian, fewer than half practice their faith**, only half deem it important, and most can't talk coherently about their beliefs, the study found.

Many teenagers thought that God simply wanted them to feel good and do good -- what the study's researchers called "moralistic therapeutic deism."

No matter their background, Dean says committed Christian teens **share four traits: They have a personal story about God they can share, a deep connection to a faith community, a sense of purpose and a sense of hope about their future.**

"There are countless studies that show that religious teenagers **do better in school, have better relationships with their parents and engage in less high-risk behavior,**" she says. "They do a lot of things that parents pray for."

Others practice a "**gospel of niceness,**" where **faith is simply doing good and not ruffling feathers.** The Christian call to take risks, witness and sacrifice for others is muted, she says.

Corrie says she sees no shortage of teenagers who want to be inspired and make the world better. But **the Christianity some are taught doesn't inspire them "to change anything that's broken in the world."**

Teens want to be challenged; they want their tough questions taken on, she says.

Corrie, echoing the author of "Almost Christian," says **the gospel of niceness can't teach teens how to confront tragedy.**

She says parents who perform one act of radical faith in front of their children convey more than a multitude of sermons and mission trips.

So here is the text for a sermon that every parent, older brother or sister, Grandparent, Aunt or Uncle, Coach, Teacher and Pastor must tack on the forehead of their daily life as a reminder of their primary commission.

We can learn this expensive grace from the early Christians. They knew they were not following cute stories or mythical super heroes. Let's look again at this text Peter wrote to some of the early believers and see if there are some clues that will help us grow in God's grace. The first thing we see through out the record of the Acts of the Apostles and the letters to the churches is that:

Grace is for participants

2 Peter 1:3-4

"His divine power has given us everything we need for life and godliness through our knowledge of him who called us by his own glory and goodness. Through these he has given us his very great and precious promises, so that through them you may participate in the divine nature and escape the corruption in the world caused by evil desires."

We possess everything we need to live transformed lives. It is our "knowledge of Him." Keep your head in the Word of God. Listen to the people who are talking about God's mission. We don't have to worry about having the strength, patience or power to be godly. All we need is the will.

Our potential can be reached with two steps:

First, we must surrender to God's Spirit through Jesus. There is a first time for this and if you have not asked God to be the Lord of your life then today is a great to start. If you

have made that decision in the past then this is another day to confess it, surrender to His will and let his character direct you.

Second, we must resist the siren call of the majority. Corruption does not come in rust eaten containers but in well formed, colored bottles that shine and call us to enjoy.

Corruption is never clothed in burial robes or decomposed flesh – but in well laid tables and flashing stages filled with beautiful figures and promises of fun. God has a wonderful future for you, but, it is found in a bag of tools for fixing His world, His creation.

Recently I witnessed an unusual accountability partnership at my church.

In an effort to break his habit of using profanity, Paul started meeting with another guy from church, and they set up an aggressive plan for holiness. Each Sunday, Paul would report to William how many times he cussed during the week, and he'd put \$5 in the offering plate for each incident. The first week cost Paul \$100. Although following weeks improved somewhat, he wasn't having the success he wanted and was losing a lot of hard-earned cash.

After the fourth week, William told Paul he had unilaterally changed the deal for the coming week, but he wouldn't tell Paul how. Paul wanted to know, but all William would say was, "Trust me. It will cost you both less and more."

The following Sunday before worship, Paul was looking a bit down, obviously having failed again. William put a hand on his shoulder and said, "Paul, this will cost you both less and more. It's called grace." At that he took out a check made out to the church, dated and signed by William. Only the amount was blank. "Your sin still costs, but for you it's free. Just fill in the numbers. And next week there will be more grace."

That first week of grace cost William \$55, but the second only cost him \$20. There was no third week. It cost Paul too much to fill in those checks, so he quit sinning.

Bill White, Paramount, California

Participation in Grace requires practice

2 Peter 1:5-7

“For this very reason, make every effort to add to your faith goodness; and to goodness, knowledge; and to knowledge, self-control; and to self-control, perseverance; and to perseverance, godliness; and to godliness, brotherly kindness; and to brotherly kindness, love.”

When I want to learn something new I have to practice it. I observe, experiment, and then reflect for the next effort. Practicing our faith involves the same process. Peter says the way to start is to add to your faith, your belief that Jesus is your savior and Lord, by doing something good.

Once you get used to doing good without being thanked or praised then you will need to get more knowledge of the need and ways to meet the need.

What you learn is going to push you to act – either in anger or compassion – no matter which – do it with temperance. You can't do everything – you can do what you can do. You can't make others do – you can do what you can do.

Once you start doing and being what God has gifted and called to you do and be – don't let circumstances slow you down.

At this point in the practice process it is crucial to remember who you are doing this for. Do not wear a holy mantle – that robe belongs to God. Give Him the glory.

Finally, you have been asked live out this life of practical faith for the benefit of the church – your spiritual family – the ones that will testify to your commitment to Jesus. The only way you can reach this level is through the highest of all characters – love that seeks what is best for the other.

That is – of course – grace.

Salvation never fails but faith leaks

2 Peter 1:8-11

“For if you possess these qualities in increasing measure, they will keep you from being ineffective and unproductive in your knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. But if anyone does not have them, he is nearsighted and blind, and has forgotten that he has been cleansed from his past sins. Therefore, my brothers, be all the more eager to make your calling and election sure. For if you do these things, you will never fall, and you will receive a rich welcome into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.”

Don't quit! The moment you stop working on your election you will find yourself trapped by your own appetites.

Thomas Costain's book *The Three Edwards* describes the life of Raynald III, a 14th-century duke in what is now Belgium. Grossly overweight, Raynald was commonly called by his Latin nickname, *Crassus*, which means "fat."

After a violent quarrel, Raynald's younger brother Edward led a successful revolt against him. Edward captured Raynald, but did not kill him. Instead, he built a room around Raynald in the Nieuwkerk castle and promised him he could regain his title and property as soon as he was able to leave the room. This would not have been difficult for most people, since the room had several windows and a door of near-normal size—none of which were locked or barred. The problem was Raynald's size. To regain his freedom, he needed to lose weight.

But Edward knew his older brother. Each day he sent a variety of delicious foods into the room. Instead of dieting his way out of prison, Raynald grew fatter. When Duke Edward was accused of cruelty, he had a ready answer: "My brother is not a prisoner. He may leave when he so wills." Raynald stayed in that room for 10 years and wasn't released until after Edward died in battle. By then his health was so ruined he died within a year—a prisoner of his own appetite.

Rich Doebler, from his sermon titled "Why Don't Christians Look More Like Christ?"

Memory Verse

2 Peter 1:5-7

“For this very reason, make every effort to add to your faith goodness; and to goodness, knowledge; and to knowledge, self-control; and to self-control, perseverance; and to perseverance, godliness; and to godliness, brotherly kindness; and to brotherly kindness, love.”

My Next Step Today is to

Memorize 2 Peter 1:5-7

Add to my faith _____

Repeat truth daily with my family and/or friends through Bible reading and devotions

Participate in a ministry at LHCC to stop my faith from leaking.