

IT'S ALL

ABOUT

Grace



"For by grace you have been saved through faith, and this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God—not the result of works, so that no one may boast." Ephesians 2:8-9



2012 BIBLE STUDY

RainbowTrail.org

We are grateful to the following writers of the 2012 Bible Study for Rainbow Trail Lutheran Camp:

Day 1: GRACE = God's Steadfast Love

Pastor Chad Kohlmeyer
Atonement Lutheran Church
Boulder, CO

Day 2: GRACE = God's Gracious, Unexpected and Sometimes, Shocking Surprises

Pastor Vera Guebert-Steward
Evergreen Lutheran Church
Evergreen, CO

Day 3: GRACE = God's Gift of Freedom From Performance

Scott Moore
Holy Cross Lutheran Church
Wheat Ridge, CO

Day 4: GRACE = God's Freedom to Perform

Pastor Mark Twietmeyer
Trinity Lutheran Church
Boulder, CO

Day 5: GRACE IN A GRACELESS WORLD

Pastor Dave Risendal
St. Peter Lutheran Church
Greenwood Village, CO

Day Camp and Preschool Study

Marisa Carlson
Bethlehem Lutheran Church
Longmont, CO

It's All About Grace

INTRODUCTION:

Grace is central to our theology as Lutherans, and our lives as Christians. It is through the saving grace of Jesus Christ that we don't have to worry about our salvation. In our study we'll explore this understanding of Grace as well as how God's grace has been present in people's lives throughout history, even in the Old Testament. This is a much wider and deeper understanding of grace than it being just our ticket into heaven.

We will explore how God's grace reaches into our daily lives and how we can be agents for God's grace in the world. Grace can free us to do amazing things, and it is a powerful concept to think that we can be instruments of God's grace in the life of other people today!

The days of this study walk us from understanding the grace in God's relationship with us to us living in grace and being grace in the lives of others:

1. **GRACE = God's Steadfast Love:** God has an immense love for His people and has been active in the lives of people since the time of the Old Testament. God sees us as his beloved children and there is nothing we can do to make God love us less.
2. **GRACE = God's Gracious, Unexpected and Sometimes, Shocking Surprises:** God gifts us with gracious surprises in our lives that can both bless and challenge us.
3. **GRACE = God's Gift of Freedom From Performance:** There is absolutely nothing we have to do to receive God's grace. Therefore, we can find rest in God from the pressures of our world to be something that is beyond our control.
4. **GRACE = God's Freedom to Perform:** Gerhard Forde said, "There is nothing you have to do to be saved. Now that you know you have to do nothing, what are you going to do?" It is out of freedom that we find purpose and meaning in life.
5. **GRACE IN A GRACELESS WORLD:** As we leave camp, we look for the sources of grace in our lives back home. We have a need to experience and be refreshed by God's grace daily. We may also have the opportunity to be grace in the lives of others.

Morning Watch is an important part of each day at camp. We will begin each Morning Watch with a short video and then move to a half hour of God Time. We hope that this discipline of quiet time during the day is one that many will take home with them as they seek to grow in their relationship with God.

I am very excited about this study. Grace is a tough concept. But I think this study takes a different approach to understanding grace and campers cannot hear enough of the saving grace of Jesus Christ and how that makes life radically different. I hope this study will also help you to continue to grow in your own faith journey. Thank you for the opportunity to be partners with you as we serve the youth, adults, and families of the Rocky Mountain Synod and beyond.



Dave Jarvis,
Executive Director

2012 BIBLE STUDY – IT’S ALL ABOUT GRACE

Day 1

Grace = God’s Steadfast Love

A. INTRODUCTION TO THE THEME

This summer we will explore together the theme, “It’s All About Grace.” Day 1 of the study focuses on “Grace = God’s Steadfast Love”. During this first day of the study, we will explore God’s grace as an expression of God’s steadfast love. God’s steadfast love is at the core of the Christian Church, and in particular, also the Lutheran Church. For thousands of years different individuals, churches and denominations have explored how exactly God relates to them, interacts with them, and thinks about them.

The Lutheran tradition has a strong opinion about God’s steadfast love and what it means for the individual. God’s nature is love. We proclaim that God’s grace is the truth that there is nothing that an individual can do to make God stop loving them. At the center of Lutheran theology is the desire to guide individuals to experience God’s profound love, knowing that it is indeed **for them**.

The process of faith starts with knowing that you are unconditionally loved by God. Second is being transformed by this grace, which leads individuals to be grace in a graceless world. This, in fact, is the progression of the Bible study these five days.

It will be important this week to make campers feel accepted in a way that they get a ‘taste of heaven’ however imperfect it is, or how much it falls short. In a world where people are starved of any type of ‘steadfast love’ we must work to ‘be grace’ for all we encounter. In other words, it may be good to say to campers often this day, and throughout the week, “you are accepted”. Because of the grace of God we are accepted for who we are, without condition. We are cherished and respected by God. This is God’s promise to us in the Rainbow after the flood and in the cross of Jesus Christ. These are both part of God’s faithfulness.

Of course, the real work begins as we go home, living what we have re-learned about our identity and belonging in God. This is a challenge, because often human nature leads children and teens to believe there is enough about them that is unlovable that that they are not worthy of love at all... whether at camp or at home.

Campers need to explore this day the grace of God as steadfast love in terms of a radically different relationship than they might be used to, especially in school, etc... So often in their lives inclusion and exclusion come and go daily, with one day things going great, and the next day feeling as an outsider. This will be a challenge for campers to delve into right at the beginning of the week, so it will be important to work very hard to build community and trust. Staff may have to rely on program staff and support staff for encouragement and ideas on how to be inclusive of all campers and how to make them feel part of the community.

Giving confidence to campers in how God sees them on day 1 will empower them for the rest of the week.

B. OBJECTIVES FOR THIS DAY OF THE STUDY

- Campers will discover through scripture study that God is active in the lives of people in Old Testament and New Testament stories, and will explore the implications and similarities for their lives. This presence is God’s grace and is the first step in understanding the pattern of God’s steadfast love for their life.
- Campers will delve more deeply into understanding that God sees them as beloved children created in his image.
- Campers will get to explore the idea of inclusion and exclusion in God’s kingdom.
- Give campers a tangible way to experience God’s steadfast love during this day.

C. MORNING WATCH

Watch the video interview of Ruth Akubu-Feza as she shares how grace (God’s steadfast love) has literally changed her life and saved her from death.

Questions for reflection

1. What was the most surprising part that Ruth shared in her interview?
2. What did this video teach you about God's steadfast love?
3. How might Ruth's story inspire you to trust God more with your life?

D. SCRIPTURE STUDY

Context

This is the first full day of camp and energy will abound! It is also true that this study talks about inclusion and exclusion, which are very personal topics for campers to talk about with peers, some of which they have known for less than one day. PLEASE take time for yourself in prayer before this study so you can be centered and prepared to lead this study.

This may be an appropriate time to make a covenant as a group about how the Bible Study time will go. Write down the covenant and remind them daily of it.

1. ***How will we respect one another?***
2. ***What is encouraged?***
3. ***What is not allowed?***
4. ***What will make this a safe environment for our group?***

Environment

Wherever you gather with the group of campers make sure that you sit in a nice close circle with everybody at approximately the same level. It is good to stay relatively close to the campers in case you need to gently remind someone to stay focused or engage more fully in the conversation.

To begin the study, ask each of the campers to give a high and a low since arriving at camp. This will be a time for you and the other campers to offer encouragement and a safe environment to participate in.

Following check-in, ask the students the following question to learn what they have absorbed from the theme: ***from what we have experienced so far today, tell me about the theme and what you have learned?*** Attempt to draw out of them any obvious examples from morning watch, morning worship or other things that have happened. It would also be excellent if you could begin the conversation about steadfast love and grace in the day's theme. You could ask the question: ***What do you think God is like? Is God really like we were told in morning worship? What questions do you have?***

Opening Prayer

Invite campers to pray at the opening and closing of this Bible Study. Before they begin, offer them some encouragement and support, offering these ideas: encourage them to use words and ideas from the experiences of the day. Invite them to pray for further understanding of God's grace in each of their lives. Tell them to thank God for the day they have been given.

The Exodus Story

You will begin this portion of the Bible Study by telling the Exodus story (Exodus chapters 1-40) from memory using the cliff notes below. Story telling is a learned art (that is, it takes time!), and I encourage you to practice this story even before you arrive for staff training. We will also practice this during staff training.

In this story we find a God who is steadfast in the midst of grumbling, complaining, and wishes to return back into slavery. They were goofballs, really not trusting God, but God stayed with them. It also introduces the very important theme of God's **gracious** presence with Israel and on into history. God was with Israel in the wilderness and did not leave their side. This is a core idea we want to get across about today's theme: **Grace = God's Steadfast Love.**

Cliff Notes on the Exodus to use as part of telling this story from memory:

- Story is about God's people, the Israelites, about 4,000 years ago.
- The Israelites had a leader named Moses.
- Moses was called by God to lead the Israelites out of slavery from the Egyptians. He was told to do this by God who was in a burning bush on a mountain!
- Moses went to Pharaoh (the leader of the Egyptians) and said, "Let my people go!"
 - Moses didn't get his way at first, but eventually did because God sent 10 horrible plagues on all of Egypt.
- Moses led the Israelites to the Red Sea, and God was with them, leading them in a pillar of cloud by day, and a pillar of fire by night, to give them light to see their way.
- When they reached the Red sea, Moses divided the Red Sea by lifting up his hands.
- When they reached the other side they sang songs of thanksgiving that they had been freed from slavery.

- The Israelites walked for three days and found water, but it was bitter and they could not drink it.
 - The people complained to Moses. He cried out to God and God told him to throw a specific type of wood into the water, and the water became sweet.
- **God provided for their needs.**

- Several months after departing from Egypt, the people really started complaining to Moses.
 - They wished they had died in Egypt instead of going into the wilderness they were now in.
 - At least they had food in Egypt! But now they were starving.
- God told Moses that he was going to rain bread from heaven.
 - They were only to gather enough for that day only.
 - They did not recognize the bread, so they said "Manna" or "What is it?"
 - It tasted like bread wafers with wild honey on it.
- In the evening they were also given Quail to eat, as it came and surrounded their camp.
- Some gathered too much and had extra until the morning and it filled with worms and smelled foul.
- This made Moses angry (and probably God too, because they didn't listen)
- **But God stayed with them.**
- **THE ISRAELITES ATE MANNA FOR FORTY YEARS BY THE GRACE OF GOD.**

- The people continued to move around, and got to one place where there was not water for them to drink.
 - they complained to Moses about this, and Moses asked why they argued with him about this, and told them that they were testing the Lord.
 - The people asked Moses, again, why he had brought them out of Egypt, only to kill them and their livestock with thirst.
- God told Moses to take his staff and strike a rock at the place called Horeb.
 - Water came from the rock for the Israelites to drink.
- **God stayed with them, even though their grumbling and lack of trust.**

- From here Moses went with the people to the wilderness of Sinai, and he went up a mountain to receive the 10 commandments.
 - Moses was on the mountain 40 days with the God.
 - The people must obey God's 10 Commandments as well as many other laws.
- The people begin to become impatient so they form a statue of a calf out of gold to be a substitute god.
 - God and Moses become very angry at their lack of patience and trust.
 - God told Moses that there would be consequences for their sin.

- Despite the great disobedience of the people **God stays with the people**, renewing the covenant, the promise to the people.
 - The promise is that all would see the good work of the Lord.

Ask the group a few questions. Below are a few suggestions:

1. ***What do you notice in this story?***
2. ***Are there some things that repeat over and over?***

3. **How did they act?**
4. **How did God respond to their actions?**
5. **How is this different, or the same, from the way you would expect God to act?**

There is no wrong answer to these questions, however it will be important for them to come to understand God's grace in the presence God had with the Israelites. God's grace is not just in sticking with them when they grumbled and complained about the salvation they had received from slavery— God's grace is also in the Israelites being rescued from the Egyptians and receiving Manna for 40 years. God is steadfast in love in this story.

Parable of the Prodigal Son (or Parable of the Prodigal and His Brother; Parable of the Lost Son; Parable of the Two Lost Sons; Parable of the Lost Son and the Prodigal Father)

The second part of the Bible Study involves a well-known parable. **To begin, ask if anyone knows the parable of the Prodigal Son, and if they can tell you anything about the story.**

Invite the campers to open up their Bibles to Luke 15, and begin reading the story: (Make them ALL open their Bibles including YOU!!!)

11 Then Jesus said, 'There was a man who had two sons. ¹²The younger of them said to his father, "Father, give me the share of the property that will belong to me." So he divided his property between them. ¹³A few days later the younger son gathered all he had and travelled to a distant country, and there he squandered his property in dissolute living. ¹⁴When he had spent everything, a severe famine took place throughout that country, and he began to be in need. ¹⁵So he went and hired himself out to one of the citizens of that country, who sent him to his fields to feed the pigs. ¹⁶He would gladly have filled himself with the pods that the pigs were eating; and no one gave him anything.

Reflection(for staff use):

When people in the Middle East hear this part of the parable they are appalled. The younger son's request is unheard of. It is as if he is wishing his father dead, asking for his inheritance while he is still living. It is interesting to note that the father does divide up the property between his two sons. This is the first hint that this parable is going to be different from other stories we hear. The father should have gotten very angry and become offended. Might there be a possibility for reconciliation because of the way the father acts?

Questions for Reflection:

1. **What do you think the father thought of his son's request?**
2. **Did the younger son want to help the family with his request?**
3. **What might the family think about this son?**
4. **What do you think the older brother thought about what his younger brother was doing?**

¹⁷But when he came to himself he said, "How many of my father's hired hands have bread enough and to spare, but here I am dying of hunger! ¹⁸I will get up and go to my father, and I will say to him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you; ¹⁹I am no longer worthy to be called your son; treat me like one of your hired hands.'" ²⁰So he set off and went to his father. But while he was still far off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion; he ran and put his arms around him and kissed him. ²¹Then the son said to him, "Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you; I am no longer worthy to be called your son." ²²But the father said to his slaves, "Quickly, bring out a robe—the best one—and put it on him; put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet. ²³And get the fatted calf and kill it, and let us eat and celebrate; ²⁴for this son of mine was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found!" And they began to celebrate.

Reflection

The younger son is in real dire straits when this section begins. He has no community around him and he becomes a beggar; a Jewish beggar pleading to feed pigs! Apparently that is not enough, or he has found no help. He has no choice

but to return back to his home region, as a beggar, and try to explain the mistake he has made and ask for forgiveness, or at least a job that he can live on.

Apparently, this son could have waited hours or even days for his father to respond to a request he was to make from quite a distance. But he doesn't have to wait. What is waiting for him is surprising – it is not punishment, yelling, or scorn from his father. It is his father setting aside all shame and running to him. Old men NEVER run in Middle Eastern culture. But the father runs to embrace his son in love, now that he was home again. I imagine the father spending his days sitting on a porch watching for his son; worrying about his son; wondering if he will ever return. This is the definition of steadfast love if there ever was one. This IS a parable of grace because of this section. In a moment when the son thought he was nothing, he was restored by his father granting him dignity, status and steadfast love... the grace of a father (the grace of God).

Questions for Reflection:

1. **What do you think the younger son was expecting from his father? His brother?**
2. **What did he deserve?**
3. **Did he get what he expected? If no, what happened?**
4. **Can you imagine a story like this happening today? What might the outcome be?**

²⁵ 'Now his elder son was in the field; and when he came and approached the house, he heard music and dancing. ²⁶He called one of the slaves and asked what was going on. ²⁷He replied, "Your brother has come, and your father has killed the fatted calf, because he has got him back safe and sound." ²⁸Then he became angry and refused to go in. His father came out and began to plead with him. ²⁹But he answered his father, "Listen! For all these years I have been working like a slave for you, and I have never disobeyed your command; yet you have never given me even a young goat so that I might celebrate with my friends. ³⁰But when this son of yours came back, who has devoured your property with prostitutes, you killed the fatted calf for him!" ³¹Then the father said to him, "Son, you are always with me, and all that is mine is yours. ³²But we had to celebrate and rejoice, because this brother of yours was dead and has come to life; he was lost and has been found." '

Reflection

This is a situation we could all find ourselves in! The fairness of this situation is obviously ridiculous, and under normal terms the younger brother should suffer some consequences. For example, he should have to work as a slave for a year before he is acknowledged as a member of the family again. It is incredibly remarkable how the father treated both of his sons in the parable. His actions are incredibly grace-filled and full of 'steadfast love', just as God acts towards those he loves.

Questions for Reflection

1. **After the father said this final statement to the older brother, how do you think he responded?** Potential answers might have been: to leave with his portion of the inheritance; if this older brother has some parallel representation to the Pharisees Jesus is speaking to in this parable it would even be fair to say that he was aggressive towards his brother, just as many people were towards Jesus in Jerusalem.
2. **As people of faith, what do you think this story is about?**
3. **Do you like the answers you gave? Do they trouble you in any way?**
4. **Is it ok that this story is not fair?**
5. **What does this say about God's steadfast love and who can receive it? Who is worthy of God's love?**

Wrap-Up

The stories in today's Bible Study will teach campers about God's steadfast love as a representation of God's grace. Ask the campers if they have any additional questions about the study, and then wrap-up the study with these sentences.

Today we have learned about God's steadfast love that is with us wherever we go, and about God's love that does not turn from us even when we are not attentive to God around us, or when we have not been interested in a relationship with God. The rest of the week we will learn more about this love and grace of God.

Distribution of Touchstones

This is the point in the study when you will give each of the campers the Touchstone to remind them of God's grace in their lives. ***As you hand each of the campers their Touchstone say to them, "this Touchstone is for you and is to be used to remind you of God's steadfast love for you."*** Also remind them that as they go through the week they will learn about different ways to remind themselves of God's steadfast love for them.

Closing Prayer

Invite a different student in the group to offer the closing prayer, reminding them that they can include the theme of Grace = God's Steadfast Love in the prayer, and that God would continue to be with them throughout the day.

E. ADDITIONAL STUDY IDEAS

- Use Psalm 103 (especially vs. 1-5) in worship or as part of a grace before or after a meal. In this Psalm there is a sense of redemptive grace. This is an important theme that emphasizes that fact that God knows us for who we are, yet forgives us.
- BAPTISMAL CONNECTION-God says, by virtue of your baptism, that you are loved even before you did anything – good or bad. Jesus' baptism was the same way, when he was baptized in the Jordan River (Mark 1:9-11), God spoke the words, "You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased." This claim is made even before Jesus began his ministry. The same is for campers – they are called blessed and loved before they are able to respond or show gratitude in any way. This is unique because most of the things in life we experience are conditional. Grades (report cards), are based on a reward from a certain kind of behavior. The order is backwards in the baptismal life. We are empowered to live our lives because of this core belief in our life of faith. Realize that some campers have not been baptized. This is a great opportunity to talk about this immense love from God and talk about maybe being baptized.
- Another powerful illustration of "grace" is the way Jesus treated persons-- accepting those who were considered outcasts by eating with them, healing them, listening and talking with them. Look at stories of who Jesus ate with, and hung out with. Try to treat others this way.
- Talk about the Sabbath as a day or time of rest. God's steadfast love says that we can bask and enjoy, taking a break from labor. This might be a day, or an hour, or five minutes a day. Grace invites us to stop and experience all we have been blessed with. For younger campers, it may work to help them understand that their parents having days off from work is for rest; stopping to give thanks, and to enjoy one another's company.
- ***Please share this story and answer the questions:*** On October 2, 2006, a thirty-two-year-old gunman entered a one-room Amish school in Nickel Mines, Pennsylvania. The gunman senselessly took the lives of five girls in that schoolhouse before taking his own life.

Before the sun had set on that awful October day members of the Amish community brought words of forgiveness to the family of the one who had killed their children. Those in the outside world were incredulous that forgiveness could be offered so quickly for such a heinous crime. The story of Amish grace eclipsed the story of violence and arrested the world's attention.

The movie 'Amish Grace' explores the many questions this story raises about the religious beliefs and habits that led the Amish to forgive so quickly. It also asks why and how forgiveness became international news. "All the religions teach it," mused an observer, "but no one does it like the Amish."

Regardless of the cultural seedbed that nourished this story, the surprising act of Amish forgiveness begs a deeper exploration.

1. **How could the Amish forgive so swiftly?**
2. **What did this act mean to them?**
3. **How might their story provide lessons for the rest of us?**

F. IDEAS TO INCORPORATE THEME THROUGHOUT THE DAY

- In a worship service, include a Remembrance of Baptism, acknowledging the source of God’s grace & steadfast love. There may be campers who are not baptized at camp several weeks. This gives a great opportunity for the person leading the remembrance to share briefly about the gifts of baptism as well as to invite campers who are not baptized into exploring the possibility and gift of baptism for them.
- Place table tents on the dinner tables this evening that simply say: Grace = God’s Steadfast Love
- At the staff meeting, with the VOD, and in Bible Studies, encourage all to act with gracefulness and love when interacting with others.
- Throughout the day have groups of staff members yell the days theme: Grace = God’s Steadfast Love. This could be used instead of “welcome to breakfast!”
- Throughout the day have groups of staff members say the theme verse together, Ephesians 2:8: *For by grace you have been saved through faith, and this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God.* This could be used instead of “welcome to breakfast!”
- During your cabin/village time, encourage your campers to make gifts (or bring Hot Chocolate to, or offer to do KP) for other cabins/villages and offer them expecting nothing in return. This will teach them about receiving gifts, and something about receiving God’s gifts of free grace, too.
- As we explore God’s steadfast love on day 1, it might be an interesting exploration to have Holy Communion on day 1, giving a physical reminder and a sacramental reminder of God’s pure grace offered to them.

G. OTHER SONGS, STORIES THOUGHTS, QUESTIONS, AND SUGGESTIONS

- | | |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------|
| * Grace Like Rain | *Psalm 27 |
| * Only Grace (Matthew West) | *Isaiah 43 |
| *Amazing Grace (traditional, or in a different style such as rock or bluegrass) | *Hippo Song |
| *Seek Ye First | *God of Wonders |
| *Psalm 25 | *Sing Alleluia |

H. IDEAS TO ADJUST STUDY DOWN FOR JUNIORS

*Before the Bible Study, photocopy and cut apart the “What to do?” handout on p. 91 in the book *Helping Children Know God* (Jarvis’ own this book). Read aloud Psalm 145:8-9. Ask:

1. What does “gracious” mean? “Compassionate?”?
2. How does God treat us with kindness?
3. How can we share God’s kindness with others?

Form groups of four and give each group one or several of the situations on the “What to do?” handout. Have each group decide how to respond to its situation in a gracious way and in an unkind way. Then have each group prepare and present a role-play of each of its responses.

Help kids plan a way to show God’s kindness to others. They might make a card for someone who is discouraged, plan a visit to a nursing home when they arrive home, or collect food that can be shared with a food shelter.

* Ask the campers these questions:

1. ***When we think of others how do we look at them?***
2. ***Do we see them for what they wear or look like?***
3. ***Or do we see them as a child of God that is loved by Him?*** Instead of making judgments of others, we should choose to look at other the way we think God looks at them.

*Talk with campers about the idea of fairness in relation to these stories. In their lives, this may be the most developed of four: fairness, justice, mercy and grace. Use this opportunity to talk about other Bible stories or scriptures that talk about the nature of God, and how God’s world is sometime upside down from the way we expect it to be.

*Talk to campers more about how inclusion and exclusion has been a part of their lives. Draw out of them the positive and the negative, and relate it to the inclusion of God’s kingdom.

I. IDEAS TO ADJUST STUDY UP FOR SR HIGHS

In the story of the Exodus God gets very angry at the Israelites for the way they acted, and before God renews the covenant, God’s anger really shines.

1. ***What do the youth make of this?***
2. ***Can God get angry?***
3. ***Could God be gracious and just and never get angry?***
4. ***Similarly, can human beings be committed to be justice and never get angry?***

Understanding the definition of ‘prodigal’ to be “Spending money or resources freely and recklessly; wastefully extravagant”, what do you think is the best title for the parable we studied today?

The options are: Parable of the Prodigal Son; Parable of the Prodigal and His Brother; Parable of the Lost Son; Parable of the Two Lost Sons; Parable of the Lost Son and the Prodigal Father.

Is there a better title for the parable they can think of?

In the parable studied this day, when do you think the younger son was “changed”? When did he “get it”? Entertain all answers from the students. The answer is not stated in the parable, but it seems that it wasn’t when he was in dire straits in the far away land. It seems more likely that the transformation was when his father acted towards him upon his return. The moment of transformation happens when the father (God) acts towards him, embracing him and changing the story of the relationship the younger son perceived it to be. As the father said, “he was lost but now is found!”

J. STAFF STUDY

Commit yourself to read the Gospel of Matthew during staff training and looking for examples of “Grace = God’s Steadfast Love”. Share these findings with your colleagues in ministry so they may be enriched by them. However, do not limit yourself to just that. Also note those places that cause you to question how certain verses fit into this promise from God to offer God’s people steadfast love.

In the following quote there is inspiration to be the kind of staff member that never gives up on trying to make an impact. It gives you the permission to have the determination of the woman in the Parable of the Lost Coin (Luke 15:8-10)

“First I shake the whole Apple tree, that the ripest might fall. Then I climb the tree and shake each limb, and then each branch and then each twig, and then I look under each leaf.” –Luther

Madeleine L’Engle wrote approximately this:

“There are three ways you can live life: cosmic accident; bad joke; or that there is a power of love behind the universe; a truth that each individual matters to God.

- 1. *What do you think about this proposal?***
- 2. *Have you waived back and forth regarding where you stand here?***

K. PARENT DEVOTIONAL

Scripture – The Parable of the Prodigal Son (Luke 15:11-32)

Reflection on the day’s study from camp

The theme for day 1 centers on God’s steadfast love. The Lutheran tradition proclaims that God’s grace is the truth that there is nothing that an individual can do to make God stop loving them. It is our prayer that through this study campers experienced real and tangible ways in which God loves them. It is important this week to make campers feel accepted in a way that they get a ‘taste of heaven’ however imperfect it is, or how much it falls short. In a world where people are starved of any type of ‘steadfast love’ we must work to ‘be grace’ for all we encounter. To those in your home: we pray these truths will be realized in your lives as well. May God bless you in your spiritual journey and your experiences with God’s grace.

A short activity for the family

Share with one another if there has ever been a time when you felt like one of the characters in the Parable of the Prodigal Son – either one of the sons or the father. Following, offer one another a blessing, making the sign of the cross on your foreheads and saying, “You are a beloved child of God. Experience God’s steadfast love today. Amen”.

Closing prayer

Ever-gracious God, thank you for your steadfast love in our lives every day. Thank you for the places and people where we experience your steadfast love. Where we have put up barriers keeping us from your love, tear them down; where we can work to show others your steadfast love, guide us. Bless each of us this week, wherever we go. In Jesus’ name we pray. Amen.

2012 BIBLE STUDY – IT’S ALL ABOUT GRACE

DAY 2

GRACE=God’s Gracious, Unexpected and Sometimes, Shocking Surprises

A. INTRODUCTION TO THE THEME

Yesterday we learned of the Steadfast Love of God. Philip Yancey suggests that Grace defined is, that there is nothing we can do to make God love us more or less. God’s love is constant, steady, perfect and strong. Through love and grace God holds us in God’s strong arms and most of the time we feel safe. And then comes a surprise; a gift of grace in the form of something unexpected that shakes our lives. The gift could be an immediate blessing. Or, the gift could shake our world and our lives and cause us to spin out of control. Both surprises are gifts but one of them, the one that rocks our socks, takes longer to realize.

These surprises from God can challenge our sensibilities about what is fair and right. Often in Jesus’ life he didn’t do what people thought was right or what they expected. He didn’t follow all the moral and religious rules that were in place that the Scribes and Pharisees based their whole life on. Instead, with his love, healing, strong presence and relational approach, he made the person’s well-being more important than the silly rules that men followed when they thought they were pleasing God.

Today we will break open the Word of God and look at the story of the woman caught in adultery. The story is a powerful one that challenged those who felt they knew what was right and just. We will have an opportunity to evaluate our own understanding of what is fair by looking at a story of shocking grace and surprising love.

B. OBJECTIVES FOR THIS DAY OF THE STUDY

- * Campers and staff will grow in their understanding that God’s ways are often beyond our understanding.
- * Campers and staff will learn that God gifts us with gracious surprises in our lives that can both bless and challenge.
- * Campers and staff will begin to develop an understanding that grace is not always fair.
- * Campers and staff will see Jesus turn the religious world upside down with his gift of grace to a woman who, according to the law, deserved to die.
- * Campers will have a new appreciation for the Grace and Love of God that almost always trumps the Law.
- * Campers will begin to realize, that the way to a deeper understanding of God’s ways in Christ Jesus, is to return to one of their many touchstones and the most important one...God’s Word.
- * Campers and staff will embrace the concept that when they are confronted with someone else’s sin, grace and love toward a broken soul wins out over judgment and condemnation.

C. MORNING WATCH

- * If we do a talking head, I’d like to use an attorney or judge who is called upon to uphold the law but understands the grace of God and that sometimes grace triumphs over law...maybe most of the time...be careful with this that we do not condone inappropriate behavior and excuse it with grace...

Maybe this person can define justice and mercy.

- * Morning watch consists of scripture, Psalm 99...message to think about, & prayer. Should last about 10 min. “Mighty King, lover of justice, you have established fairness. You have acted with justice and righteousness...” How do you think God is a “lover of justice?” What does this mean? When the Psalmist talks about God establishing fairness, how do you think that fairness should be played out in our world and our personal lives? God wants people to be right with each other and with God. Through whose life and death have we been made right with God? And because of that gift of love and grace, how should we live toward others?

D. SCRIPTURE STUDY

BACKGROUND INFO:

Before reading the verses related to our study, read the verses listed here from the 7th chapter of John's Gospel. Reading a chapter before and after the initial basis for a Bible Study will always help you place the study's material in cultural and historical context.

³⁷On the last day of the festival, the great day, while Jesus was standing there, he cried out, "Let anyone who is thirsty come to me, ³⁸and let the one who believes in me drink. As the scripture has said, 'Out of the believer's heart shall flow rivers of living water.'" ³⁹Now he said this about the Spirit, which believers in him were to receive; for as yet there was no Spirit, because Jesus was not yet glorified. ⁴⁰When they heard these words, some in the crowd said, "This is really the prophet." ⁴¹Others said, "This is the Messiah." But some asked, "Surely the Messiah does not come from Galilee, does he?" ⁴²Has not the scripture said that the Messiah is descended from David and comes from Bethlehem, the village where David lived?" ⁴³So there was a division in the crowd because of him. ⁴⁴Some of them wanted to arrest him, but no one laid hands on him. ⁴⁵Then the temple police went back to the chief priests and Pharisees, who asked them, "Why did you not arrest him?" ⁴⁶The police answered, "Never has anyone spoken like this!" ⁴⁷Then the Pharisees replied, "Surely you have not been deceived too, have you? ⁴⁸Has any one of the authorities or of the Pharisees believed in him? ⁴⁹But this crowd, which does not know the law—they are accursed." ⁵⁰Nicodemus, who had gone to Jesus before, and who was one of them, asked, ⁵¹"Our law does not judge people without first giving them a hearing to find out what they are doing, does it?" ⁵²They replied, "Surely you are not also from Galilee, are you? Search and you will see that no prophet is to arise from Galilee." Then each of them went home...

The story unfolds in four stages. The first stage of our Bible Study story sets the scene (7:53--8:2). The meeting of the chief priests and Pharisees with their servants, the "temple guards" (7:45-52), presumably took place on the last (and seventh) day of the feast (see note on 7:37). As this passage stands in this context, Jesus is coming early to the temple to teach on the morning of the added eighth day of the feast, which was a day of rest (Lev 23:39) "Now, the fifteenth day of the seventh month, when you have gathered in the produce of the land, you shall keep the festival of the LORD, lasting seven days; a complete rest on the first day, and a complete rest on the eighth day."

Now read the next 11 verses of John 8 from the New Living Translation (NLT) with commentary interspersed.

A Woman Caught in Adultery

Jesus returned to the Mount of Olives, ² but early the next morning he was back again at the Temple. A crowd soon gathered, and he sat down and taught them. ³ As he was speaking, the teachers of religious law and the Pharisees brought a woman who had been caught in the act of adultery. They put her in front of the crowd.

⁴ "Teacher," they said to Jesus, "this woman was caught in the act of adultery. ⁵ The Law of Moses says to stone her. What do you say?" ⁶ They were trying to trap him into saying something they could use against him, but Jesus stooped down and wrote in the dust with his finger.

In the second stage of our story (8:3-6) we read of the challenge presented to Jesus by the Jewish leaders. Their treatment of the woman is callous and demeaning. If she had committed adultery the previous evening (which is perhaps more likely than around dawn, v. 2), then we can assume these opponents had been holding her during the night and waiting for Jesus to show up in order to use her to test him. Her fear would have been great and placing her in the midst of a crowd would have been incredibly humiliating. As a loving and respectful feminist, I'd have to add that a certain attitude of male-chauvinism comes across in their statement that the Law of Moses commands the stoning of *such women* (v. 5). To be more precise, the law speaks of the death of **both** the man and the woman involved (Lev 20:10; Deut 22:22-24).

Of course these opponents have a commendable zeal for righteousness. They want justice to be done and they are fully expecting that the right thing be accomplished. They are absolutely certain they know what should happen because they are adherers to the law. However, their understanding of the righteousness of God is shallow and they show absolutely no concern for the soul of the woman. One of the goals of today's study is to help campers understand that Jesus always has more concern for the well-being and soul of an individual than condemning them to death for their sin. It is life that Jesus came to give...not condemnation and death.

Furthermore, Jesus' opponents are being deceitful. There is no evidence that this law was carried out with any regularity, so they are raising a question in the name of loyalty to Moses, using a part of Moses' teaching that they themselves most likely have not kept. Besides that, the law says both the man and the woman who commit adultery are to be killed so we are left to wonder why the guy was not brought in as well. It may be that he had escaped, but the fact that only the woman is brought to Jesus raises suspicions and does not speak well of their zeal for the law of Moses; for if they were really committed, they would have brought the man as well. Indeed, the law makes it clear that stoning could only take place after a careful trial, which included the chance for the condemned to confess his or her wrong (*m. Sanhedrin* 6:1-4). The hypocrisy of the opponents is evident.

It is obvious that this situation is an attempt to trap Jesus (v. 6). If he is lax toward the law, then he is condemned. But if he holds a strict line, then he has allowed them to prevail in their ungodly treatment of this woman and has opened himself up to trouble from the Romans, for he will be held responsible if the stoning proceeds. The leaders of Israel are putting God to the test in the person of his Son, repeating the Israelites' historical pattern on more than one occasion in the wilderness at Meribah and Massah (Ex 17:2; Num 20:13; cf. Deut 6:16; Ps 95:8-9; 106:14).

⁷ *They kept demanding an answer, so he stood up again and said, "All right, but let the one who has never sinned throw the first stone!"*⁸ *Then he stooped down again and wrote in the dust.*

⁹ *When the accusers heard this, they slipped away one by one, beginning with the oldest, until only Jesus was left in the middle of the crowd with the woman.*

The third stage of the story is Jesus' response to the Scribes and Pharisees (vv. 7-9). You can just see this scene unfold, can't you? While remaining seated he bends over and writes with his finger on the ground. There is conjecture about what Jesus wrote but no really knows. What Jesus did know however is that even writing two letters on the Sabbath was against the Law of Moses. He didn't do it just once but twice after they pressed him for a response. And respond he did.

Jesus called for the one without sin to cast the first stone. And they left...the oldest first. It has often been suggested that the eldest accusers were the first to leave (v. 9) because they recognized their own sinfulness more readily. However, leaving in this order may simply reflect the custom of deferring to the elders.

¹⁰ *Then Jesus stood up again and said to the woman, "Where are your accusers? Didn't even one of them condemn you?"*

¹¹ *"No, Lord," she said. And Jesus said, "Neither do I; Go and sin no more."*

Finally, Jesus is left alone with the woman standing before him. As Augustine says, "The two were left alone, *miseram et misericordiam*" ("a wretched woman and Mercy"; *In John* 33.5). Now the final act of the story unfolds which is Jesus' response to the woman in verses 10-11. Jesus straightens up and asks for a report of what happened, as if he had been totally oblivious to what took place as he concentrated on his writing. He does not ask her about the charges but rather about that aspect of the situation most heartening to the woman: *Where are they? Has no one condemned you?* (v. 10). They had of course condemned her in their accusations, but by not following through on the charge they had thrown out her case.

There is however one who could still execute judgment. It was Jesus himself, the only one present that was without sin who could throw the first stone. I wonder if she was hopeful at this point in the story of still frightened that she would be fully exposed and condemned. Finally, this adulterous woman becomes a memorable example of the fact that "God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him" (3:17). Jesus says to her, "Neither do I condemn you. Go, and from now on no longer sin" (8:11).

Jesus grants pardon; Jesus forgives but does not acquit. He knew she was guilty of the sin of adultery. He chooses to offer grace. They fully expected that Jesus would have to, according to the law, condemn her to death and allow the stoning to take place. He chose not to condemn unlike those who brought her to such a place of humiliation. The grace he offered; the freedom he offered was totally unexpected and an amazing surprise to one who thought her life was over. Jesus condemned the sin but not the sinner (Augustine *in John* 33.6). And more than that, he called her to a new life. The gospel is not only the forgiveness of sins, but a new quality of life that overcomes the power of sin (cf. 8:32-36; 1 Jn 3:4-6).

This story illustrates a pastoral issue. As Augustine noted (*In John* 33.8), we are in danger from both hope and despair. That is, we can have a false optimism that says "God is merciful so I can do as I please" which Bonhoeffer calls "cheap grace." Or we can despair and say "there is no forgiveness for the sin I have committed."

There is no sin that God does not forgive. At the beginning of this study I suggested that Yancey defined grace as "nothing I can do to make God love me more or less." This applies to both the bullies (the Jewish leaders; the Pharisees) and the bullied (the Adulterous Woman). It is my hope that the Jewish leaders; the Pharisees walked away from this scene amazed at how much love Jesus had not only for the woman but also for them. **He condemned no one in this story.** His grace covered both the bullied and the bully-ers even though the bully-ers may not have come to this realization until long after this incident took place.

Initially, the Jewish leaders, the P's must have been infuriated by Jesus' action. They wanted Jesus to follow the law. They wanted Jesus to do the right thing according to their thinking. After all, their whole lives had been based on keeping the Law. But God's ways are so different and strange compared to ours. Paul suggests in Romans 11: "*Oh, how great are God's riches and wisdom and knowledge! How impossible it is for us to understand his decisions and his ways!*" We want revenge. God offers new life. We want God to judge and condemn those we feel are wrong. God forgives and grants mercy. We want God to fit into our way of thinking and living. God always blesses in God's own way which is usually a reversal of everything we think appropriate. Jesus turns the religious world upside down and in doing so surprises both the bullied and the bully-er.

This passage also contains extremely significant revelation of Jesus' identity. The fact that it comes in this Synoptic style and yet fits so well in this context in John makes it all the more remarkable. The opponents challenged Jesus regarding the law of Moses by saying, essentially, Moses tells us to stone such a person, but you--what do you say? (v. 5, *you* is emphatic in the Greek). Jesus sets aside Moses' clear command, albeit one that few ever acted on in Jesus' day. He does not follow through on Moses' command even when challenged to do so, which leads us to believe that he is more than just a prophet (see comment on 9:34).

Jesus does not say explicitly that he forgives the woman, but that's the implication when he says he does not condemn her and then tells her to not sin again. Jesus mediates the forgiveness of God (cf. Mt 9:1-8; Mk 2:3-12; Lk 5:18-26; 7:36-50) and in doing so, he bypasses the temple and acts in a divine role.

NOW, ON TO THE STUDY WITH THE KIDS...

BEGIN BY OPENING THE STUDY WITH THIS PRAYER OR ANOTHER:

Gracious God, your love is perfect and pure, everlasting and deep. Thank you for loving me the way you do. In this hour as we study your Word, open our hearts to your Holy Spirit. Teach us through this time and the story we will read that your Grace is amazing, surprising, unsettling and challenging. Help us to understand that how you treat others is really how we should treat others, too. Give me honesty and strength to hear the truth. We pray all this in your holy name. Amen.

BREAKING THE ICE:

Remember a time when you were bullied or you bullied someone. What were the circumstances? Why did it happen? Were your friends around? Did anyone stick up for you? Did you back off if you were the bully-er? Any regrets?

HELPING THE KIDS UNDERSTAND THE STORY OF THE ADULTEROUS WOMAN:

Before we read the story of the Adulterous woman, let's talk about what some terms mean. Help me to define and understand the words:

Justice...what does this word imply to you? (That things are fair...and right...reasonable and honest.) Justice means that the right thing will be done according to the law. In religious terms it might mean that all are treated equally and fairly.

Now how about the word...Mercy...what does this word imply to you? That someone is treated humanely, compassionately, with understanding and even with pity.

The story we are about to read is a story of grace and love. It is a story that implies and requires that justice is done. It is also a story of extreme mercy by the Son of God. Let's read it and try to find the deeper meaning of God's grace, unexpected, surprising even unfair grace.

READ JOHN 8:1-11

A Woman Caught in Adultery

Jesus returned to the Mount of Olives,² but early the next morning he was back again at the Temple. A crowd soon gathered, and he sat down and taught them.³ As he was speaking, the teachers of religious law and the Pharisees brought a woman who had been caught in the act of adultery. They put her in front of the crowd.

Questions before going further: How do you think the woman must have felt being paraded in front of a crowd of people who probably knew her and lived in her community? How would you feel?

⁴ *"Teacher," they said to Jesus, "this woman was caught in the act of adultery.⁵ The Law of Moses says to stone her.*

Questions for discussion: Do you remember anything about the Pharisees and Scribes? They were Jewish men who followed the Law of Moses to the "t." They felt that if they obeyed the law they would receive God's blessings and eternal life. If God's grace, God's love is unconditional, why do you think they kept the law? Is it easier to keep the law or live in God's grace? Why?

What do you say, Jesus?"⁶ They were trying to trap him into saying something they could use against him, but Jesus stooped down and wrote in the dust with his finger.⁷ They kept demanding an answer, so he stood up again and said, "All right, but let the one who has never sinned throw the first stone!"⁸ Then he stooped down again and wrote in the dust.

Questions for discussion: Who was being bullied? Who were the bully-ers? Why did Jesus' response shut up the Pharisees? How do you think they felt when Jesus said to them: "If you haven't sinned, throw the first stone?" What do you think they expected Jesus to do to the woman? Do you suppose they hoped Jesus would approve of their desire to stone the woman? What did the law say should happen to the woman? And when Jesus didn't approve of their plan, how do you think they felt? Were they angry...confused...irritated...insulted?

⁹ *When the accusers heard this, they slipped away one by one, beginning with the oldest, until only Jesus was left in the middle of the crowd with the woman.¹⁰ Then Jesus stood up again and said to the woman, "Where are your accusers? Didn't even one of them condemn you?"¹¹ "No, Lord," she said. And Jesus said, "Neither do I. Go and sin no more."*

Questions for discussion and comments: After the accusers left Jesus is alone with the woman. What do you suppose she was thinking would happen to her? According to the law, Jesus should have condemned her to death instead he commends her to go and stop sinning. He should have nailed her instead he offers his forgiveness and grace. \

How do Jesus' actions differ from how the world would act toward such a sinful person? How far does Jesus' grace extend? Would the Scribes and Pharisees be gifted with the same grace if they were open to it? What lessons do you think the Scribes and the Pharisees learned from Jesus' actions?

God's surprises come in different ways. Sometimes what seems like a hurtful experience can turn into a huge learning experience about the love and grace of God.

Finally...read this verse:

¹² *Jesus spoke to the people once more and said, "I am the light of the world. If you follow me, you won't have to walk in darkness, because you will have the light that leads to life."*

Thoughts and questions for discussion:

As humans we can choose to live however we want to. Knowing that God loves us and that God's love will never go away, what do you think our response could and maybe should be? Knowing that God in Jesus doesn't condemn us, how should we live toward others?

Read the following Bible passage from Matthew, chapter 7.

"Do not judge others, and you will not be judged. ² For you will be treated as you treat others. The standard you use in judging is the standard by which you will be judged. ³ "And why worry about a speck in your friend's eye when you have a log in your own? ⁴ How can you think of saying to your friend, 'Let me help you get rid of that speck in your eye,' when you can't see past the log in your own eye? ⁵ Hypocrite! First get rid of the log in your own eye; then you will see well enough to deal with the speck in your friend's eye."

Questions for discussion:

According to this brief story from Matthew, chapter 7, how are we called to live with others? The bottom line is God's grace is for all people and God's grace and righteousness covers everyone which means that when God looks at any of us, God sees us through the cross of Jesus and in God's eyes, we all look the same. Surprisingly, God would bless the one being judged, the one being made fun of, the one who is being hurt but God surprisingly blesses even the one doing the judging. What does that make you feel? God's grace will continue to surprise us and God's love will continue to amaze us.

***A STORY FROM MAX LUCADO'S BOOK, "In the Grip of Grace."**

Romans 2:1 ***"If you think you can judge others, you are wrong. When you judge them, you are really judging yourself guilty, because you do the same things they do. God judges those who do wrong things, and we know that God's judging is right."***

You know what disturbs me most about Jeffrey Dahmer? What disturbs me most are not his acts, though they are disgusting. Dahmer was convicted of seventeen murders. Eleven corpses were found in his apartment. (Lucado goes into more detail here but I don't think it's necessary to share it.)

Dahmer redefined the boundary for brutality. The Milwaukee monster dangled from the lowest rung of human conduct and then dropped. But that's not what troubles me most.

Can I tell you what troubles me most about Jeffrey Dahmer? Not his trial, as disturbing as it was, with all those pictures of him sitting serenely in court, face frozen, motionless. No sign of remorse, no hint of regret. Remember his steely eyes and impassive face? But I don't speak of him because of his trial. There is another reason. Can I tell you what really troubles me about Jeffrey Dahmer?

Not his punishment, though life without parole is hardly an exchange for his actions. How many years would satisfy justice? A lifetime in jail for every life he took? But that's another matter, and that's not what troubles me most about Jeffrey Dahmer. May I tell you what does?

His conversion. Months before an inmate murdered him, Jeffrey Dahmer became a Christian. Said he repented. Was sorry for what he did. Profoundly sorry. Said he put his faith in Christ. Was baptized. Started life over. Began reading Christians books and attending chapel. Sins washed. Soul cleansed. Past forgiven.

That troubles me. It shouldn't, but it does. Grace for a cannibal?

Maybe you have the same reservations. If not about Dahmer perhaps about someone else. Ever wrestled with the deathbed conversion of a rapist or the eleventh-hour conversion of a child molester? We've sentenced them, maybe not in court, but in our hearts. We've put them behind bars and locked the door. They are forever imprisoned by our disgust. And then, the impossible happens. They repent.

Our response? (Dare we say it?) We cross our arms and furrow our brows and say, "God won't let you off that easy. Not after what you did. God is kind, but he's no wimp. Grace if for average sinners like me, not deviants like you."

And for proof we might turn to Romans 1 which reads: "God's anger is being shown against..." And then Paul lists it all, sexual sin, evil, selfishness, hatred, jealousy, murder... So we want to shout, "Go get 'em, Paul! It's about time someone pulled back the blanket on adultery and turned the light on dishonesty. Nail those perverts. String up those porn peddlers. We'll stand by you, Paul! We decent, law-abiding folks are with you."

Paul's response? "If you think that leaves you on high ground where you can point your finger at others, think again. Every time you criticize someone, you condemn yourself. It takes one to know one."

***MY OWN THOUGHTS**

For me, the writer of this Bible Study, this story stirs me, too. How can God be gracious to someone who is so awful? Shouldn't God be concerned for those of us that have lived a pretty good life? How can God's love extend even to someone who has taken another person's life...or innocence...or worldly goods? It seems so unfair. It even makes me angry. But that's the deal with grace. It doesn't fit our idea of fairness or justice. It is God's gig and work. I am no less sinful than the next person and no more sinful than the next person. In the eyes of God we've all goofed. And the good news in all of this is that God doesn't see where we've messed up. God sees our goodness because of the grace of God in Jesus Christ and his death on the cross.

Remember the story of Jesus' crucifixion. You may hear more about it tomorrow. For now just remember that a condemned criminal was sent to his death by his country. In his final moments, he asked for mercy from the people and it was denied. He asked mercy of the government and the soldiers. Of course again...it was denied. Had he asked it of his victims, the people he hurt, they, too, would have turned a deaf ear. But it wasn't to these that he turned for grace. He turned instead to the bloodied form of the One who hung on the cross next to his cross. He pleaded: "Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom." And doggonit...wouldn't you know... Jesus answered him by saying, "I tell you the truth, today you will be with me in paradise."

Wow! That's grace. That's the amazing, unfair, unexpected surprise of God's grace. Even those we think don't deserve it, get it. And man oh man...it's most amazing that we get it, too. Thanks be to God!

Touchstones: Have everyone take out their touchstone. Talk about our touchstone for this day is the Bible. The way to a deeper understanding of God's love and God's ways in Christ Jesus, is to return to God's Word. The Bible is the story of God's immense love for his people and all the ways that God's grace challenged and surprised his people.

Closing prayer: Have everyone take a minute and think about a time when God surprised them in a moment of grace. Then pray, going around the circle and having each person share their grace moment in one sentence.

E. ADDITIONAL STUDY IDEAS

Huge Heart

Use butcher paper or several sheets of red poster-board to create a huge heart on a flat wall. Make sure you have several markers or pens. Explain to the campers that the heart represents God's grace. Remind the campers that God loves each of them deeply and God's love and grace for them is eternal. Allow the campers to approach the giant heart and write letters or messages to God thanking God for the gift of forgiveness and grace. Also ask them to write the name of someone they have hurt when they have been judgmental or unkind. Then pray...pray that God will bless them and forgive them and cover them with God's amazing grace every day.

An Offering of Love

During hike day, invite your campers to gift someone with an unexpected gift of love, affirmation or grace. Perhaps just a word of kindness, a helping hand or walking beside someone who is struggling could be a blessing to someone needing an act of Grace. Remind them that God's gift of grace comes to all of us unexpectedly and graciously as well.

A False Summit

Folks that are hiking Eagle today will come to a point where they think they are almost to the top when instead; they've reached a "false summit." Remind kids during quiet time at night after the hike that we all live with a sense of having arrived on our own. It's the false summit of life. Help them remember that it is only by God's grace that we truly reach the peak of life. It is only by God's grace that we live well...grow strong...and bless the world.

I Corinthians 13

Study Paul's explanation of love in 1 Corinthians 13. Start by discussing the different love relationships people have: parent/child, brother/sister, relatives, husband/wife and friends. Allow campers to talk about how they feel about parents, siblings or a relative they greatly admire. Divide the group in half before reading the scripture. Ask one group to explain what they learn about God's love from the reading. The other half is to listen to what Paul says you are like if you do not have love. On a poster board or white board, write out the list that the campers give you. Ask, "What are you like if you don't have love?" and "What are examples of showing God's love?" Bring the group of campers back together to share their findings. Pray that God will give them the qualities of love that God hopes for in each of God's children.

A BLOG ABOUT THE LOVE OF JESUS "He Loves Me" (Posted: Aug 02 2011 04:19:15pm by [hispianolady](#))

Use this story when the kids are falling asleep at night. It is powerful!!

It all started when I was seven. I believed almost anything or anyone for that matter. I listened to what I was told and wondered why I had to obey, no matter how felt about it, just ask my mother.

One day, in a class room full of many other children. I was told a story of a man who came from heaven down to earth and chose to give His life for me. I listen to that story with wonderment and knew that I wanted know Him, as the teacher said "to live inside my heart." so I prayed with the teacher to let Him come and live in my heart and help me to "be a good little lady" as my grandpa would say. The moment I prayed I knew, He now lived inside my heart. I had joy like I had never had before and a peace that covered me like a warm blanket.

Days turned into months, and years went by; with Him walking along side me, helping me and guiding me and loving me. Then one day I walked into the hall of my high school and found that no one wanted to my friend because of Him and so I went home and said to "I cannot take you to school with me, people do not like you and I need friends, "you understand right?" and I turned and walked away.

He stood there knowing that I need Him now more than ever in my life, and it broke His heart to see me walk away from Him. But it was my choice and so I let him go. I found this new "I can do anything I want" feeling about the things that I knew were wrong. I could still hear His voice faintly in the back of my mind, but I wanted to be liked and, just as I told him, I needed friends.

I found a group of kids that liked me so well, that they let me smoke and drink and watch grown up movies with them. Oh! It was awhile it didn't feel so fun, but hey I'm almost an adult, why can't I do as I like, It's my life! From time to time I'd think about talking to Him and telling Him about my life and how I felt so lost without Him and oh how my heart missed Him so. But after a few more tries of taking Him to see my friends, I once again left Him at home, waiting to talk with me and love on me.

Then one day I thought I loved someone and gave myself away, I thought for sure it was real love, it even felt like love, but I soon found that it was anything but real. I watched as my heart broke into tiny little pieces, I tried to pick them up and put it back together, but it was no use. Nothing I could do was going to mend my heart. So I put them way into my pocket, to keep them from anymore hurt or pain. I walked around feeling like I was even more worthless and unloved then I ever did before. The shame and guilt that jabbed at my very broken heart, relentlessly reminded me of what I had done.

I thought I wanted to die, because there was no reason to live, now that I had given the only thing worth of any value, to someone I hardly knew and that really didn't love me after all. Time has a way of making you forget about a lot of things, even the one that truly loves you and accepts you just the way you are. I had all but forgotten what it felt like to be loved.

Then one night, a few years after high school was over, I was alone in my room and out of no where, I just started humming a song from my childhood, I'm my beloveds and he is mine, His banner over me is love and as I did, I could feel someone in the room. At first I looked and nothing was there, but then, there it was again; something I had not felt in years. I almost couldn't believe it. I thought maybe I was just being weird and went on with what I was doing, it wasn't

even five minutes later and I knew that someone was in my room. As I turned around tears started to run down my face and before I had time to think, I fell to my knees and felt the deepest, truest, and realest love that I had ever felt. As I closed my eyes I saw Him, I saw the face of love, of grace, of true beauty. I started telling Him I was so sorry for everything I had done wrong.

I began to beg Him to forgive me, but to my amazement, He stood there with a smile on His face, He extended His hand to me and drew me close to Him and said, "I have always been with you and have always loved you. There was never a time I was not with you, or that I haven't loved you. His embrace was so pure and gentle; so life giving it almost took my breath away. I took a step back and as the tears kept falling, I reached into my pocket where the pieces of my heart lay aching and almost too tender to touch. The frail pieces rested in the palm of my hand. Then I looked up at Him and without words handed the tiny pieces to Him.

He cupped them in His hands and softly blew on them as they lay almost lifeless. After a moment or two He handed to me what looked like a heart, but with deep scars still visible and placed it, not in my pocket where I had gotten it from, but into my flesh. At that moment I felt a weight lift and a joy that I couldn't put into words. As tears once again fell from my eyes, I felt His hand touch my chin, He lifted my eyes to meet His own and said to me "You are my daughter and I have bought you with a price. I laid down my life for you, and you, my precious one and I forgive you. I shed my blood to pay for your sins because I loved you and wanted to have you as my very own, YOU ARE MINE".

His words seemed to melt the ache of my heart away. I felt the place where He had put my heart and looked at Him. Before I could speak, He softly said, "I have started the healing process of your heart and, as you walk with me, we will work on it together, healing will come. Remember to look to me when you are feeling alone, look to me when you are afraid, I am always with you." I didn't know what to say, there were no words that could come close to the emotion I felt, tears kept flowing from my eyes as I stood before Him. I once again looked into the face of pure light, pure love, and pure truth. He leaned towards me and softly kissed my forehead, then whispered "I love you" then I looked up at Him, and knew that I could never love anyone more than Him. He was love itself. He was grace. He was my life. I whispered back to Him "Jesus, I love you. I fell asleep that night in His blanket of peace. I knew that I was forgiven and my past was just that, the past. He paid for it all.

F. IDEAS TO INCORPORATE THEME THROUGHOUT THE DAY

- * Use rocks along the trails you hike this day or when you end your hike to discuss the idea of "throwing the first stone." Ask campers to bring them back to camp; draw crosses on them and lay them at the foot of the cross at the circle symbolic of laying our burdens, judgments, and sins down at the feet of Jesus.
- * Re-enact the story of the "stoning of the adulterous woman." It is dramatic in and of itself. I'm guessing the kids could do amazing things with this story. It might even be a great drama for a camp video.
- * Stone Soup is an old [folk story](#) in which hungry strangers persuade local people of a town to give them food. It is usually told as a lesson in cooperation, especially amid scarcity. In varying traditions, the stone has been replaced with other common inedible objects, and therefore the fable is also known as **button soup**, **wood soup**, **nail soup**, and **axe soup**. In the [Aarne-Thompson](#) folktale classification system it is type 1548.

Some travelers come to a village, carrying nothing more than an empty cooking pot. Upon their arrival, the villagers are unwilling to share any of their food stores with the hungry travelers. Then the travelers go to a stream and fill the pot with water, drop a large [stone](#) in it, and place it over a fire. One of the villagers becomes curious and asks what they are doing. The travelers answer that they are making "stone [soup](#)", which tastes wonderful, although it still needs a little bit of [garnish](#) to improve the flavor, which they are missing. The villager does not mind parting with a few carrots to help them out, so that gets added to the soup. Another villager walks by, inquiring about the pot, and the travelers again mention their stone soup which has not reached its full potential yet. The villager hands them a little bit of [seasoning](#) to help them out. More and more villagers walk by, each adding another ingredient. Finally, a delicious and nourishing pot of soup is enjoyed by all.

Somehow incorporate Stone Soup into worship...asking kids to bring something to offer of themselves. Then at some point during worship it gets added to the pot sitting in the midst of the campers or at the foot of the cross.

G. OTHER SONGS, STORIES THOUGHTS, QUESTIONS, AND SUGGESTIONS

* Jesus, Remember Me, More Precious Than Silver, Trading My Sorrows, Fill My Cup, Psalm 25, Create in Me a Clean Heart, Be Bold, Light the Fire, Jesus, Lover of My Soul, Every Move I Make, Grace Like Rain, Mighty to Save

* Additional scripture...**Mark 10:35-45**

³⁵ Then James and John, the sons of Zebedee, came to him. "Teacher," they said, "we want you to do for us whatever we ask." ³⁶ "What do you want me to do for you?" he asked. ³⁷ They replied, "Let one of us sit at your right and the other at your left in your glory." ³⁸ "You don't know what you are asking," Jesus said. "Can you drink the cup I drink or be baptized with the baptism I am baptized with?" ³⁹ "We can," they answered. Jesus said to them, "You will drink the cup I drink and be baptized with the baptism I am baptized with, ⁴⁰ but to sit at my right or left is not for me to grant. These places belong to those for whom they have been prepared." ⁴¹ When the ten heard about this, they became indignant with James and John. ⁴² Jesus called them together and said, "You know that those who are regarded as rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their high officials exercise authority over them. ⁴³ Not so with you. Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, ⁴⁴ and whoever wants to be first must be slave of all. ⁴⁵ For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many."

Here is another example of how Jesus turns the disciples' notion of the Kingdom of God upside down. They think that because they have been "chosen" by Jesus to walk with him during his tenure of ministry on this earth that they deserve positions of prestige and power. Instead Jesus clarifies their misconstrued thinking by suggesting that those who want to become great must be a servant and whoever wants to be first in line needs to make sure that all are fed and cared for ahead of themselves. Grace is a gift of unconditional love for all people. It raises all people to positions of importance in the Kingdom. Nothing we can do can earn God's favor or positions of power or authority. Our goodness is a gift along with the forgiveness of our sins and the privilege of being last and least.

* Alexander and the No Good, Very Bad Day by Judith Viorst

H. IDEAS TO ADJUST STUDY DOWN FOR JUNIORS

Grace as a Free Gift from God is not an easy concept to understand. Perhaps Barrington Bunny Martin Bell's short story found in his book "The Way of the Wolf" might be able to help you clarify it for them.

Once upon a time in a large forest there lived a very furry bunny. He had one lop ear, a tiny black nose, and unusually shiny eyes. His name was Barrington. Barrington was not really a very handsome bunny. He was brown and speckled and his ears didn't stand up right. But he could hop, and he was, as I have said, very furry. In a way, winter is fun for bunnies. After all, it gives them an opportunity to hop in the snow and then turn around to see where they have hopped. So, in a way, winter was fun for Barrington. But in another way winter made Barrington sad. For, you see, winter marked the time where all of the animal families got together in their cozy homes to celebrate Christmas. He could hop, and he was very furry. But as far as Barrington knew, he was the only bunny in the forest.

When Christmas Eve finally came, Barrington did not feel like going home all by himself. So he decided he would hop for a while in the clearing at the center of the forest. Hop. Hop. Hippity-hop. Barrington made tracks in the fresh snow. Hop. Hop. Hippity-hop. Then he cocked his head and looked back at the wonderful designs he had made. "Bunnies," he thought to himself, "can hop. And they are very warm, too, because of how furry they are."
(But Barrington didn't really know whether or not this was true of all bunnies, since he had never met another bunny.)

When it got too dark to see the tracks he was making, Barrington made up his mind to go home. On his way, however, he passed a large oak tree. High in the branches there was a great deal of excited chattering going on. Barrington looked up.

It was a squirrel family! What a marvelous time they seemed to be having. "Hello, up there," called Barrington. "Hello, down there," came the reply. "Having a Christmas party?" asked Barrington. "Oh, yes!" answered the squirrels. "It's Christmas Eve. Everybody is having a Christmas party!" "May I come to your party?" said Barrington softly. "Are you a squirrel?" "No." "What are you, then?" "A bunny." "A bunny?" "Yes." "Well, how can you come to the party if you're a bunny? Bunnies can't climb trees." "That's true," said Barrington thoughtfully. "But I can hop and I'm very furry and warm." "We're sorry," called the squirrels. "We don't know anything about hopping and being furry, but we do know that in order to come to our house you have to be able to climb trees." "Oh, well," said Barrington. "Merry Christmas." "Merry Christmas," chattered the squirrels.

And the unfortunate bunny hopped off toward his tiny house. It was beginning to snow when Barrington reached the river. Near the river bank was a wonderfully constructed house of sticks and mud. Inside there was singing. "It's the beavers," thought Barrington. "Maybe they will let me come to their party." And so he knocked on the door. "Who's out there?" called a voice. "Barrington Bunny," he replied. There was a long pause and then a shiny beaver head broke the water. "Hello, Barrington," said the beaver. "May I come to your Christmas party?" asked Barrington. The beaver thought for a while and then he said, "I suppose so. Do you know how to swim?" "No," said Barrington, "but I can hop and I am very furry and warm." "Sorry," said the beaver. "I don't know anything about hopping and being furry, but I do know that in order to come to our house you have to be able to swim." "Oh, well," Barrington muttered, his eyes filling with tears. "I suppose that's true-Merry Christmas." "Merry Christmas," called the beaver. And he disappeared beneath the surface of the water.

Even as furry as he was, Barrington was starting to get cold. And the snow was falling so hard that his tiny, bunny eyes could scarcely see what was ahead of him. He was almost home, however, when he heard the excited squeaking of field mice beneath the ground. "It's a party," thought Barrington. And suddenly he blurted out through his tears, "Hello, field mice. This is Barrington Bunny. May I come to your party?" But the wind was howling so loudly and Barrington was sobbing so much that no one heard him. And when there was no response at all, Barrington just sat down in the snow and began to cry with all his might. "Bunnies," he thought, aren't any good to anyone. What good is it to be furry and to be able to hop if you don't have any family on Christmas Eve?" Barrington cried and cried. When he stopped crying he began to bite on his bunny's foot, but he did not move from where he was sitting in the snow. Suddenly, Barrington was aware he was not alone. He looked up and strained his shiny eyes to see who was there.

To his surprise he saw a great silver wolf. The wolf was large and strong and his eyes flashed fire. He was the most beautiful animal Barrington had ever seen. For a long time the silver wolf didn't say anything at all. He just stood there and looked at Barrington with those terrible eyes. Then slowly and deliberately the wolf spoke. "Barrington," he asked in a gentle voice, "why are you sitting in the snow?" "Because it's Christmas Eve," said Barrington, "and I don't have any family, and bunnies aren't any good to anyone." "Bunnies are, too, good," said the wolf. "Bunnies can hop and they are very warm." "What good is that?" Barrington sniffed. "It is very good indeed," the wolf went on, "because it is a gift that bunnies are given, a free gift with no strings attached. And every gift that is given to anyone is given for a reason. Someday you will see why it is good to hop and to be warm and furry." "But it's Christmas," moaned Barrington, "and I'm all alone. I don't have any family at all." "Of course you do," replied the great silver wolf. "All of the animals in the forest are your family." And then the wolf disappeared. He simply wasn't there. Barrington had only blinked his eyes, and when he looked-the wolf was gone.

"All of the animals in the forest are my family," thought Barrington. "It's good to be a bunny. Bunnies can hop. That's a gift." And then he said it again. "A gift. A free gift." On in the night Barrington worked. First he found the best stick he could. (And that was difficult because of the snow.) Then hop. Hop. Hoppity-hop. To beaver's house. He left the stick just outside the door. With a note on it that read: "Here is a good stick for your house. It is a gift. A free gift. No strings attached. Signed, a member of your family." "It is a good thing that I can hop, he thought, "because the snow is very deep." Then Barrington dug and dug. Soon he had gathered together enough dead leaves and grass to make the squirrels' nest warmer. Hop. Hop. Hoppity-hop. He laid the grass and leaves just under the large oak tree and attached this message: "A gift. A free gift. From a member of your family." It was late when Barrington finally started home. And what made things worse was that he knew a blizzard was beginning. Hop. Hop. Hoppity-hop.

Soon poor Barrington was lost. The wind howled furiously, and it was very, very cold. "It certainly is cold," he said out loud. "It's a good thing I'm so furry. But if I don't find my way home pretty soon I might freeze!" Squeak. Squeak. . . . And

then he saw it—a baby field mouse lost in the snow. And the little mouse was crying. "Hello, little mouse," Barrington called. "Don't cry. I'll be right there." Hippity-hop, and Barrington was beside the tiny mouse. "I'm lost," sobbed the little fellow. "I'll never find my way home, and I know I'm going to freeze." "You won't freeze," said Barrington. "I'm a bunny and bunnies are very furry and warm. You stay right where you are and I'll cover you up." Barrington lay on top of the little mouse and hugged him tight. The tiny fellow felt himself surrounded by warm fur. He cried for a while but soon, snug and warm, he fell asleep. Barrington had only two thoughts that long, cold night. First he thought, "It's good to be a bunny. Bunnies are very furry and warm." And then, when he felt the heart of the tiny mouse beating regularly, he thought, "All the animals in the forest are my family."

The next morning, the field mice found their little boy, asleep in the snow, warm and snug beneath the furry carcass of a dead bunny. Their relief and excitement was so great that they didn't even think to question where the bunny had come from. And as for the beavers and the squirrels, they still wonder which member of their family left the little gift for them that Christmas Eve. After the field mice had left, Barrington's frozen body simply lay in the snow. There was no sound except that of the howling wind. And no one anywhere in the forest noticed the great silver wolf that came to stand beside that brown, lop-eared carcass. But the wolf did come. And he stood there. Without moving or saying a word. All Christmas Day. Until it was night. And then he disappeared into the forest.

Grace is God's gift unconditional love...no strings attached. It's most profound example is in the life of Jesus Christ who gave himself that we might live forever, forgiven and set free to bless and live for others. If you get that across to the campers this week you will have accomplished a great deal.

I. IDEAS TO ADJUST STUDY UP FOR SR HIGHS

It might be a challenge for you to lead a discussion of God's grace as it relates to Hitler, Saddam Hussein or Osama Bin Laden but I think it's important to help High School Campers understand that God's grace covers even these perpetrators of evil. If any of these men would have asked with their dying breath for forgiveness and grace, God would have granted it. That's how radical and extreme God's love is. Such amazing Grace ticks us off...challenges our thinking...seems totally unfair but that's how the Kingdom works. Grace and judgment are God's work. Ultimately, grace flows through us, too, and becomes our work. Grace, yes! But never judgment. That's sets us up on the top of the humanity heap. It's not our place to dwell there!

J. STAFF STUDY

Bonhoeffer on Costly Grace:

CHEAP GRACE is the deadly enemy of our Church. We are fighting today for costly grace. Cheap grace means grace sold on the market like cheapjacks' wares. The sacraments, the forgiveness of sin, and the consolations of religion are thrown away at cut prices. Grace is represented as the Church's inexhaustible treasury, from which she showers blessings with generous hands, without asking questions or fixing limits. Grace without price; grace without cost! The essence of grace, we suppose, is that the account has been paid in advance; and, because it has been paid, everything can be had for nothing. Since the cost was infinite, the possibilities of using and spending it are infinite. What would grace be if it were not cheap?

Cheap grace means grace as a doctrine, a principle, a system. It means forgiveness of sins proclaimed as a general truth, the love of God taught as the Christian "conception" of God. An intellectual assent to that idea is held to be of itself sufficient to secure remission of sins. The Church which holds the correct doctrine of grace has, it is supposed, ipso facto a part in that grace. In such a Church the world finds a cheap covering for its sins; no contrition is required, still less any real desire to be delivered from sin. Cheap grace therefore amounts to a denial of the living Word of God, in fact, a denial of the Incarnation of the Word of God.

Cheap grace means the justification of sin without the justification of the sinner. Grace alone does everything, they say, and so everything can remain as it was before. "All for sin could not atone." The world goes on in the same old way, and we are still sinners "even in the best life" as Luther said. Well, then, let the Christian live like the rest of the world, let him model himself on the world's standards in every sphere of life, and not presumptuously aspire to live a different life under grace from his old life under sin. That was the heresy of the enthusiasts, the Anabaptists and their kind. Let the Christian beware of rebelling against the free and boundless grace of God and desecrating it. Let him not attempt to erect a new religion of the letter by endeavoring to live a life of obedience to the commandments of Jesus Christ! The world has been

justified by grace. The Christian knows that, and takes it seriously. He knows he must not strive against this indispensable grace. Therefore--let him live like the rest of the world! Of course he would like to go and do something extraordinary, and it does demand a good deal of self-restraint to refrain from the attempt and content himself with living as the world lives. Yet it is imperative for the Christian to achieve renunciation, to practice self-effacement, to distinguish his life from the life of the world. He must let grace be grace indeed; otherwise he will destroy the world's faith in the free gift of grace.

Let the Christian rest content in his worldliness and with this renunciation of any higher standard than the world. He is doing it for the sake of the world rather than for the sake of grace. Let him be comforted and rest assured in his possession of this grace--for grace alone does everything. Instead of following Christ, let the Christian enjoy the consolations of his grace! That is what we mean by cheap grace, the grace which amounts to the justification of sin without the justification of the repentant sinner who departs from sin and from whom sin departs. Cheap grace is not the kind of forgiveness of sin which frees us from the toils of sin. Cheap grace is the grace we bestow on ourselves.

Cheap grace is the preaching of forgiveness without requiring repentance, baptism without church discipline, Communion without confession, absolution without personal confession. Cheap grace is grace without discipleship, grace without the cross, and grace without Jesus Christ, living and incarnate.

Costly grace is the treasure hidden in the field; for the sake of it a man will gladly go and sell all that he has. It is the pearl of great price to buy which the merchant will sell all his goods. It is the kingly rule of Christ, for whose sake a man will pluck out the eye which causes him to stumble, it is the call of Jesus Christ at which the disciple leaves his nets and follows him.

Costly grace is the gospel which must be sought again and again, the gift which must be asked for, the door at which a man must knock. Such grace is costly because it calls us to follow, and it is grace because it calls us to follow Jesus Christ. It is costly because it costs a man his life, and it is grace because it gives a man the only true life. It is costly because it condemns sin and grace because it justifies the sinner. Above all, it is costly because it cost God the life of his Son: "ye were bought at a price," and what has cost God much cannot be cheap for us. Above all, it is grace because God did not reckon his Son too dear a price to pay for our life, but delivered him up for us. Costly grace is the Incarnation of God.

Costly grace is the sanctuary of God; it has to be protected from the world, and not thrown to the dogs. It is therefore the living word, the Word of God, which he speaks as it pleases him. 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. Grace 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."

[Source "Devotional Classics" edited by Richard J. Foster & James B. Smith; "The Cost of Discipleship" by Dietrich Bonhoeffer.]

The gift of Grace cost God the life of God's only Son. Today ask yourself what your response might be to such an amazing gift? A Seminary professor of mine used to use the example of a vertical line from the heavens intersecting with a horizontal line of human life. His suggestion was that from the heart of God flows the gift of love and grace. Once it reaches our lives it is to flow from us horizontally to everyone we meet. May it be so in your life as a counselor, staff person or camp hand this very day and every day you live.

K. PARENT DEVOTIONAL

Scripture - Ephesians 2:4-9

"But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us,⁵ even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved—⁶ and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus,⁷ so that in the coming ages he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus.⁸ For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God,⁹ not a result of works, so that no one may boast."

Reflection of the day's Study from Camp

*How does it make you feel when you receive a special gift from someone? Adults have a problem receiving gifts. They always want to return the favor so that they don't owe anyone anything. The first thing they think about doing is giving something back.

When I was a kid we were taught to write a thank-you note. That's it! We wrote a note saying thank you to the person who gave us the gift. What do you think God expects of us when we receive God's gift of love? Nothing? I don't think so. I think that God hopes we write a thank you note, too. But that thank you note comes in a different form. The thank you note happens when we thank God by giving the same love we received from God away to our neighbors, family, and friends and even to ourselves. That's the best thank you note to God we could ever write.

A short activity for the Family

*Take a moment right now, as you study together, to write a thank you note to someone who has gifted you with God's love. And maybe even write a note to someone who needs encouragement today. That's God's gift of grace happening through you to someone in need.

Closing prayer

*Pray your own prayer or use what's included here if you'd like:

Gracious, Surprising, Amazing God, we are so grateful that you love us. We are thankful that you have given us the gift of Jesus Christ whose life, death and rising from the grave has blessed us with forgiveness and life forever. Help us to be really grateful people who love each other with the same, deep love that you have for us. And then fill us with the power of your Holy Spirit that we might share your love and grace with people in the world we don't even know. We pray this in Jesus' holy name. Amen.

2012 BIBLE STUDY – IT’S ALL ABOUT GRACE

Day 3

Grace = God’s Gift of Freedom From Performance

A. INTRODUCTION TO THE THEME

“Do not dwell upon your inner failings... Just do this: Bring your soul to the Great Physician – exactly as you are, even and especially at your worst moment... For it is in such moments that you will most readily sense God’s healing presence.” - Teresa of Avila

The good news is God’s love is steadfast and will continually surprise us. You have nothing to purchase or prove, no one to impress. You are loved, you are accepted who you are, and you are not alone. You are considered to be someone of worth, and are given gifts by God that make you capable to be who you are. You are free to be who God created you to be, and to find rest in God’s grace. God’s grace has given you the gift of freedom from having to perform to be worth something.

One of the reasons that we cannot experience God’s grace in our lives is that we feel like we have to do something to get it. There can’t be anything further from the truth. This is a lie that all of us have told ourselves at some time in our lives, or maybe we tell ourselves this lie every day. We think that if we don’t perform to a certain level then we will not be accepted or loved by others or even God. God’s message to us is that there is nothing that we have to do in order to be loved by God or rest in God.

B. OBJECTIVES FOR THIS DAY OF THE STUDY

- Help students identify areas of their life that they pressure to be something beyond their control
- Give relatable examples of freeing oneself from the bondage of performance
- Campers should be able to identify a person, place, verse, ... that will help provide them a place of rest, and freedom from performance.
- Understanding that we don’t have to perform for God or others, and therefore we can find rest in God
- Answer the question -What do we have to do to receive God’s grace... Nothing

C. MORNING WATCH

[Movie clip – person interview, illustration ...](#)

D. SCRIPTURE STUDY

1. If you had to name one thing that you did really well, the one thing you think you do best, what would that one thing be?
2. What did you have to do to get to the point that you were really good at that one thing?
3. Is there anyone who has helped you to get to that point?
(These questions are designed to get the students talking with one another and to start thinking about their own life. It is good to have the campers talk about positives in their lives before we move into areas in which they might be struggling)

After all the students are sitting in a circle, ask a volunteer to tell about something that “binds” that person, or something that others would like them to be that they feel they are not. It would be beneficial for the group if everyone would share aloud, but if someone does not want to share make sure that they have something in mind. After the first person has said something that binds them, give them the **ball of yarn**. Have the camper hold on to the yarn as they pass the ball to someone else. Continue this until everyone has shared, and the whole group has been bound together.

Say – The things that we have mentioned have bound us up, but God’s grace can bring us freedom.

Pass a pair of scissors around the circle and have the campers cut the yarn that’s bound them.

Ask the students to close their eyes, listen, and imagine that the following words are thoughts they are having. If Christianity is supposed to be a life filled with joy and meaning, then why is it that I always feel like I am struggling and don't measure up to what others want me to be? I am getting tired of always trying to meet the expectations of others. Somehow the things that should make me feel good often end up making me feel guilty, and like I should be able to do better. Why do I find myself repeating patterns in my life that I promised myself I would never do again? I feel like I just need to find some rest from all of the pressures in my life.

Have the students open their eyes.

If you feel like this, then you are not alone. Needing rest doesn't mean that you are sleepy, but rather that you are emotionally or spiritually drained. Being spiritually tired might be the most paralyzing kind of tired. Do you also feel like everyone that you talk to about this only gives you more things you should be doing instead of giving you the opportunity to rest and just be you?

Have the students act out this short skit to illustrate what it might be like to need rest.

Characters:

Peyton - popular overachiever, who is nice to everyone and keeps a smiling façade, but deep down is truly hurting.

Dad/Mom - represents God and is always willing to listen and help.

Casey – Peyton's popular friend who doesn't take her seriously and tends to take her for granted.

Jordan – Peyton's ditzy cheerleading friend who is focused only on herself.

Teacher - very absentminded; tries to be helpful but really only puts Peyton down.

Taylor - a sensitive and guileless person; kind of a reject, but Peyton is still nice to her.

Peyton: (in bed, waking up sniffling and angry) God! Where are you?! Can't you hear me?! Don't you see that I'm suffering? (Crying) But do you know what the worst part is, God? It's that no one cares, or no! No one KNOWS that I'm hurting inside.

Dad/Mom: Peyton! Time to wake up. You don't want to be late for school do you?

Peyton: (wipes her tears, and tries to brighten her voice) No, (pause) of course I wouldn't want to be late.

Peyton: (arrives at school and walks towards her friends)

Casey: Hey Peyton! Over here. How was your weekend?

Peyton: It was alright, I guess; just the same old same old. I went to the movies and saw the sweetest movie ever! I was about this girl who was an orphan and she met this guy and...

Casey: Yeah, I get the picture. (said sarcastically) I don't know why you watch movies like that.

Peyton: Sure, whatever. I got to get to class, so I'll meet you after school by your car, okay?

Casey: Okay, if you insist.

Peyton: (walking toward class and thinking out loud) If you insist? What does he mean by that? Am I too pushy? Am I con-? (Before she can say controlling Whitney calls her name and breaks her train of thought)

Jordan: Hey Peyton! Yeah you, who else? So, did you hear about what John said to Rebecca over the phone last night?

Peyton: (looking puzzled) No.

Jordan: Well, he was like, Rebecca I think you're really hot, but maybe - okay are you ready for this? He said, "maybe for now we should just be friends". Okay, and that's not even the worst part! That scumbag had the nerve to show up with Stephanie Cooper, this morning! I know, what a LOSER!

Peyton: (absentmindedly) Yeah, that's great Jordan.

Jordan: What!? Are you even listening to me, Peyton?

Peyton: I'm sorry, What; it's just that I've been going through a lot of stress lately, being class president, basketball captain, dealing with friends, doing my homework. It's just really getting to me, ya know?

Jordan: Yeah sure Peyton, whatever you say. Is that Danny Carmichael? Well, I have practice get to so I'll talk to ya later.

Peyton: Goodness! What is wrong with everyone?! I don't think I can do it anymore. I just don't

Teacher: Peyton! Do you think that you could pay attention? Although, you might be incapable of that, so if you could stay afterwards we can have a nice chat! Okay?

Peyton: Okay. (in a monotone voice)

Teacher: Peyton, I haven't known what to do with you lately? You seem...distracted? Is there something wrong? Can I help in some way? You are so bright, but lately I've been thinking that you should be in Special Ed.

Peyton: What?! I mean, I have been distracted and tired lately. I don't even know why, but I feel worn out and depressed. Like nobody's listening to what I have to say, you know?

Teacher: (glancing at the clock) Oh! You know what, Peyton, I completely forgot that I have an appointment right now. Can we finish this later?

Peyton: Sure, it wasn't that important, anyway. It never is.

Teacher: Great! Remember, you're special in your own way.

Peyton: (at the lockers) 22- 15- 35.

Taylor: Peyton! Hey over here. How ya been?

Peyton: Fine, just fine. How about you?

Taylor: Well, actually not to good. (Shakily) My parents (inhales) are getting a divorce. And I think that it's all my fault! (Taylor starts crying)

Peyton: (Peyton put a hand on Taylor's shoulder) Oh, Taylor, it's not your fault; these things just happen.

Taylor: I wish I had your life; it's so perfect.

Peyton: (shocked and angry that everyone thinks her life is perfect) Taylor! I'm sorry but I can't talk right now. I hope you feel better.

Taylor: What?

Peyton walks into the house and throws her backpack down.

Dad/Mom: Hey, you don't look so good. How was your day?

Peyton: It was ok...(starts to cry). It was horrible! Everyone thinks that I'm so steadfast and strong and that I have this perfect life. But the truth is, I hate my life! There is no point in living anymore. I need help. No one will even listen to me. I'm tired I'm depressed, daddy, I just don't know what to do anymore.

Dad/Mom: Come here. (Dad/Mom embraces Peyton) Everything is going to be alright. I promise you. Now, let's go talk. (The two of them walk off stage together.)

Transitional Statement:

No matter how strong we are, or how mature our faith is, we all experience moments in life when our struggles seem to overcome us. It's not necessarily an indication of weak faith or sin or punishment from God; sometimes, it can just be "life." In those moments, we need to have a close enough relationship with Jesus that we can turn to Him for relief from our burdens. Let's spend the next few moments studying what that looks like.

1. We all have bad days. When was your last bad day and what happened?
2. How did you handle feeling what you felt?
3. How do you think God looks at us when we're down?
4. How does He respond to us when we come to Him like that?

Jesus wants to be a place of rest for you. Jesus wants you to be able to give up your struggles or burdens to him. Jesus is that place that you can go and be set free to be yourself .

In Matthew 11:28-30 Jesus says:

²⁸ "Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. ²⁹ Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. ³⁰ For my yoke is easy and my burden is light."

11:28 Come to me. This passage shows the willingness of the Lord. Jesus is not only willing, but invites us, to come to him. Note how gracious the invitation is. It is the Lord who speaks. He invites us to come to him. The invitation is to those who struggle and carry burdens. The promise that Jesus offers to anyone who comes to him is rest. The offer is not that of a man, but of the Savior. The rest that Jesus is offering is peace for the soul.

11:29 Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me. He has first asked us to come, and made a gracious promise. He next shows us how to come. We are to come by taking Jesus' yoke or teachings upon us. Taking on the teaching is a symbol of submission. The two steps by which we come, and secure the promise of rest unto our souls are then (1) Trust in Christ, (2) Becoming Christ's disciples.

11:30 For my yoke *is* easy. The yoke that others impose on us is heavy, and bearing it brings no rest. So, too, the yoke of false or unhealthy expectations of who we are to be; but Christ's yoke is easy. It is not hard to bear it because it is given in love.

1. What does Jesus say He will do for those that come to Him?
2. How did Jesus describe His yoke and His burden?
3. Do you think Jesus can be trusted with our problems/burdens? Why or why not?
4. What are some of the most common burdens we as young people need to bring to Jesus?
5. Do you ever have the urge to keep your burdens to yourself? Why?

My burden is light. His burden, even if it be the cross, is light, because he helps us to bear it. We have to trust that Jesus will walk with us in our hard times and in the good times.

In Galatians 5:1 we read: "It is for freedom that Christ has set us free. Stand firm, then, and do not let yourselves be burdened again by a yoke of slavery."

The freedom that Christ has given us in this verse is not having to conform to the expectations of others in order to receive acceptance. This freedom is a free gift that God has given to us, and not something that we have to achieve or earn. This type of freedom leaves room for genuine diversity. This type of freedom will free us from the anxiety of having to please others, or meeting expectations that others impose on us. We are accountable only to God, in whose service we will find perfect freedom.

In the story of Martha and Mary, we find Martha trying to earn Jesus' favor, getting frustrated with Mary who has found rest and freedom in Jesus, as she sits and listens to him teach.

Luke 10:38-42

[38] As Jesus and his disciples were on their way, he came to a village where a woman named Martha opened her home to him. [39] She had a sister called Mary, who sat at the Lord's feet listening to what he said. [40] But Martha was distracted by all the preparations that had to be made. She came to him and asked, "Lord, don't you care that my sister has left me to do the work by myself? Tell her to help me!" [41] "Martha, Martha," the Lord answered, "you are worried and upset about many things, [42] but only one thing is needed. Mary has chosen what is better, and it will not be taken away from her."

1. What did Mary do to earn Jesus' favor, to get to sit and listen to him?
2. Did Martha want to join them? Why or why not?
3. Why didn't Martha sit and talk with Jesus too?

Let's take a few minutes to study this passage, and understand what all is happening.

If we look back at *verse 38* we find that Martha opened up her home for Jesus. She invites Jesus to stay in her home. It is spoken of as "her home." Mary may have lived with her, though we aren't told this for sure. Sometimes we get the impression that Mary is the spiritual one, while Martha is not. But Martha's invitation indicates her openness to spiritual things. She, too, longs to be a disciple, and wants to honor Jesus by inviting him to her home.

In *verse 39* we read about Mary sitting at Jesus' feet and listening to Jesus. The idea of Mary sitting at Jesus' feet suggest that she was sitting not at a place of honor, but rather in a position of humility or of learning. This can also be interpreted that Mary's desire was to be a disciple of Jesus. Jesus encourages Mary to sit listen. I imagine the scene with Jesus seated in a place of honor, perhaps in the house's courtyard, surrounded by eager listeners -- his disciples, prominent members of the community, probably Lazarus, and of course Mary. Jesus speaks, answers questions, tells parables, and teaches. All the time Mary sits and takes it in. She can't imagine anything better than this!

1. Who is someone in your life that makes you feel special, that reminds you that God loves you? This person would be someone that you could call, text, Facebook, or go out for ice cream with to help you get through the pressures of life.
2. How does this person help you?
3. These people can be great mentors in our faith and help us grow in our relationship with God, but they are still human. Has an important person in your life ever let you down? How did that make you feel? Remember God's promise is that there is absolutely nothing you can do to make God love you any less and nothing you can do to make God love you anymore.

In *verse 40* we learn where Martha is at this point. She is distracted by the preparations. Martha is getting very frustrated with Mary. They are hosting Jesus and his disciples, and her sister Mary is not helping at all to get dinner ready, get things ready for the company, or take care of her responsibilities. The reality is that Martha also wanted to listen to

Jesus, but the pressures of providing hospitality to their guests kept her from doing that. Martha even asks Jesus to tell Mary that she is in the wrong by not helping out.

In verse 41-42 we read of Jesus' response to Martha. Jesus recognizes that Martha is worried about a lot of things, and then proceeds to tell her that there really is only one thing that she needs to worry about. What we learn from Jesus' gentle correction of Martha's actions is that Mary's choice to sit at Jesus' feet and listen to him teach is affirmed. This might be the response you would think Jesus would give. After all, Mary is not taking care of her responsibilities.

1. Have you ever had an experience like this? Have you ever felt like what you were doing was the right thing to do only to find out that you were wrong?
2. What was the experience like for you? What did you feel like when you found out you were wrong?

Jesus explains the lesson he is trying to teach in the last part of verse 42 – “it will not be taken away from her.” Even though it goes against the grain of the culture, and even though it means that Mary would be neglecting her duties, Mary has correctly discerned that resting in Jesus teaching and learning from him is more important than anything else.

The one thing that Jesus wants above all else is time that you spend resting, listening, and growing in him - time when you just sit at his feet. Nowhere else will you be able to find freedom from all the pressure to be something, than at the feet of Jesus who created you just to be you.

How does knowing that God loves us and frees us to be ourselves change us?

Imagine that this story happened with you and Jesus instead of Martha. Jesus might have said to you, _____ (fill in the blank with every camper's name in your group) why don't you take off your apron and sit down for a few minutes. Dinner can wait. There's something very dear to my heart that I would like to share with you, you personally. Do you have some time right now? I want you to know that everything that you are doing for me is great and I appreciate it, but that is not the only thing that matters. What matters is that we get to know each other. I think that you will find that if we have the opportunity to become better friends, I can help you be freed from all that junk in your life that is holding you down from being the person you really want to be, and that person I want you to be.

Touchstone

Share this with your campers: “Take out your touchstones and hold them in your hands. Today touchstone is a reminder that there is absolutely nothing you have to do to receive the grace and favor of God. Know that you can rest in this one relationship with God that, no matter what, you are loved and cherished.

Prayer

Gracious God, when I look at my own life, I see that I often give into the pressure of trying to perform to get others and you to accept me. Help me to understand that there is nothing that I could ever do to make you love me less or love me more. I have trouble sitting still before you. Please forgive me for my restlessness. Help me to come to you to find my rest from having to perform. Help me to listen with open ears and a focused and attentive mind to what you want to teach me. In Jesus' name, I pray. Amen

E. ADDITIONAL STUDY IDEAS

- Tie in the idea of the touch-stone. Use the touch-stone to remind the campers of that place, person, event that helps them find rest in Jesus and freedom from performing.
- *Alternate conclusion to the study to provoke more thought:*

(from Daniel W. Erlander's book Water Washed and Spirit Born)

Understanding that God loves us for who we are, and in this relationship God brings liberation, freeing us from...

1. THE LAW, the threat-filled life of keeping rules for the approval of God or the admiration of people.
2. PERFECTIONISM, the stressful life of trying to be perfect to please God, other, and ourselves.
3. CERTITUDE, trying to have no doubts, questions, or struggles, clinging to absolutes in order to feel secure and to judge others.
4. PRIDE, needing to be in places of honor and prestige.
5. DOMINATION, controlling others, having power over others
6. HATRED, the joyless life of despising other persons or groups and wishing them ill.
7. DESEPTION, having to fake it to look good, to cover my weaknesses, denying I am saint and sinner.
8. SIN, Self-centeredness, playing God, using others, non-trust in God's way, idolatry- trusting anything other than God for worth, security, salvation.
9. EVIL POWERS, voices, conventional wisdom, whose empty and false promises lead to exclusion, division, destruction, and finally death.
10. FEAR OF DEATH, which leads to feverish attempts to guarantee security and avoid risk.
11. DENIAL of who I am – human, of the earth, not in control, limited, dust returning to dust- yet a beautiful creation of a loving God.
12. FOOLISHNESS, not thinking of consequences – like supporting unjust systems which lead to war or division.

F. IDEAS TO INCORPORATE THEME THROUGHOUT THE DAY

1. Morning and evening worship ideas
 - a. Incorporate an opportunity for students to leave at the foot of the cross what is keeping them from being free in Christ.
 - i. Have them write it on paper and throw it in the fire
 - ii. Nail it to the cross
 - b. Communion – have the presiding pastor explain how communion can be a freeing experience so we can live in communion with God.
2. All camp evening activities:
Play games that involve freeing others
 - a. Capture the flag
 - b. Angry Birds

G. OTHER SONGS, STORIES THOUGHTS, QUESTIONS, AND SUGGESTIONS

Suggested songs for the day:

- Here I am Lord
- Here I am to Worship
- Grace Like Rain
- Humble Thyself
- You are My All In All

Supporting Story

This is the true story about a group of students in Los Angeles that were tired and needed to be set free to be themselves away from the pressures of everyday life. Listen as they tell about how being set free by their teacher gave them the opportunity to become who God created them to be.

Following the Rodney King Riots and the O.J. Simpson trial, the mood in our city was unsettling, and on our first day of high school, we had only three things in common: we hated school, we hated our teacher, and we hated each other.

Whether it was official or not, we all knew that we had been written off. Low test scores, juvenile hall, alienation, and racial hostility helped us fit the labels the educational system placed on us: “un-teachable,” “below average,” and “delinquents.” We needed someone to set us free to be ourselves. Somehow, Ms. G recognized our similarities, and used them to unite us. She gave us books written by teenagers that we could relate to, and it was through these books that we began to realize that if we could relate to a little girl named Anne Frank who lived on the other side the world, fifty years

before we did, we could certainly relate to each other. Anne was a Jewish girl who had to go into hiding during the Second World War to escape being captured by the Nazis.

We felt like Anne Frank needing to escape from those who didn't think we were any good. We were so inspired by the story of Anne Frank that we wrote letters to Miep Gies, the woman that hid her family from the German Nazis, in hopes that she would come to our school and share her story with us. When Miep visited us, she challenged us to keep Anne's memory alive and "passed the baton" to us. It was then that we decided to begin chronicling our lives.

We began writing anonymous journal entries about the adversities that we faced in our everyday lives. We wrote about gangs, immigration, drugs, violence, abuse, death, anorexia, dyslexia, teenage love, weight issues, divorce, suicide, and all the other issues we never had the chance to express before. We discovered that writing is a powerful form of self-expression that could help us deal with our past and free us to move forward. Our classroom was like Anne's attic, it was our safe haven, where we could cry, laugh, and share our stories without being judged.

We decided to call ourselves the Freedom Writers after learning about the Freedom Riders who fought against segregation during the Civil Rights Movement.

1. Do you have a place that you can go, like these students class room, where you are free to express your true self? What is this place like for you?
2. Do you have a burden that you are carrying that has worn you down, or made you feel trapped, what is it?
3. What would have to happen in order for you to be set free from that burden?

H. IDEAS TO ADJUST STUDY DOWN FOR JUNIORS

Instead of using the freedom writers illustration use the following:

Think back with me if you will to a time when you were about 5 yrs. Old. Can you remember playing all day, not a worry in the world? Can you remember the feeling of your pillow at the end of the day? You just had a bath, put on your soft footies PJ's, and slid under your fresh sheets as your mother rubbed your head and put you to sleep.

Do remember what it felt like to go to bed and not wake up until morning?
How did that make you feel?

Now compare that image with this one, you went to school yesterday, and other kids made fun of you because your pants didn't fit right. When everyone was being picked to be on a team you were the last one to be picked, and when you went to lunch none of your friends would sit with you to eat. You felt like no one wanted to be around you and no one accepted you for who you are.

I. IDEAS TO ADJUST STUDY UP FOR SR HIGHS

Seeking the Giver of Freedom, Grace, and Love – Philip Yancey *Where is God When it Hurts?*

Addition Story for advanced discussion or new perspective:

On the surface, the book of Job centers on the problem of suffering. Underneath, a different issue is at stake: the doctrine of human freedom. Job had to endure undeserved suffering in order to demonstrate that God is ultimately interested in freely given in love

The contest posed between Satan and God was not trivial exercise. Satan's accusation that Job loved God only because "you have put a hedge around him," stands as an attack on God's character. It implies that God, alone, is not worthy of love; faithful people like Job follow God only because they are "bribed" to do so. Job's response when all the props of faith were removed would prove or disprove Satan's challenge.

To understand this issue of human freedom, it may help to imagine a world in which everyone truly does get what he or she deserves. That world would be just and consistent, and everyone would clearly know what God expected. Fairness would reign. There is, however, one huge problem with such a tidy world: it's not at all what God wants to accomplish on earth. God wants from us love, freely given love, and we dare not underestimate the premium God places on that love. Freely given love is so important that God allows our planet to be a cancer of evil in the universe – for a time.

If this world ran according to fixed, perfectly fair rules, there would be no true freedom. We would act rightly because of our own immediate gain, and selfish motives would taint every act of goodness. In contrast, the Christian virtues described in the Bible develop when we choose God and God's ways in spite of temptation or impulses to do otherwise.

God wants us to choose to love freely, even when that choice involves pain, because we are committed to God, not to our own good feelings and rewards. God wants us to cleave, as Job did, even when we have every reason to deny God. Job clung to God's justice when he was the best example in history of God's apparent injustice. He did not seek the Giver because of gifts; after all gifts were removed, he still sought the Giver.

1. How do you think your own insecurities keep you from loving God?
2. Do you feel that you are worthy of God's love? Why or why not?
3. How do you think that the values of the Christian life free you to love yourself, love God, and love others?

J. STAFF STUDY

1. If you could take away all the performance based acceptance you feel in your life, how would your life change?
2. If you could take away all the performance based acceptance you feel in your life, how would your role as a camp staff person change?
3. How are our insecurities affected by your longing for acceptance from someone other than Jesus?

K. PARENT DEVOTIONAL

Scripture - In Matthew 11:28-30 Jesus says:

²⁸ "Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. ²⁹ Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. ³⁰ For my yoke is easy and my burden is light."

Reflection on the day's study from camp

One of the reasons that we cannot experience God's grace in our lives is that we feel like we have to do something to get it. There can't be anything further from the truth. This is a lie that all of us have told ourselves at some time in our lives, or maybe we tell ourselves this lie every day. We think that if we don't perform to a certain level then we will not be accepted or loved by others or even God. God's message to us is that there is nothing that we have to do in order to be loved by God or rest in God.

A short Activity for the family

1. List ways that you see God's grace in the life of your family
2. Talk about how God's grace has freed you from a burden you were carrying

Closing Prayer

Gracious God, help me to understand that there is nothing that I could ever do to make you love me less or love me more. Help me to come to you to find my rest from having to perform. Help me to listen with open ears and a focused and attentive mind to what you want to teach me. Amen

2012 BIBLE STUDY – IT'S ALL ABOUT GRACE

DAY 4

Grace: God's Freedom to Perform

A. INTRODUCTION TO THE THEME

Let's review a few definitions of grace:

You and I are accepted, fully and totally accepted by God, now, always, without condition, without deserving, without question. To be accepted in this way means to be cherished, to be loved, to be guarded from ultimate evil. It means that who we basically are is valued, honored and respected. It means that we don't have to earn or deserve such care; it is simply there for us, ours as an outright gift. The grace of God is given to us at God's initiative. It is an expression of God's love for us, of God's desire, of God's unconditional acceptance, an expression of the very nature of God's being.

William Barclay, in *New Testament Words*, says that the Greek word for grace was originally a military term. When an emperor came to the throne or celebrated a birthday, he would give his troops a *donatirim* (donation) or *charisma*, which was a free grant of money, a free gift. They had not earned it as they had their wages; it was given out of the goodness of the emperor's heart. Whatever other meanings the word may have carried in the Greek language, it is this emphasis that is picked up by the writers of the New Testament when speaking of the grace of God. It is essentially something that is unearned. It is also undeserved. I may give someone a gift that is unearned because I think they deserve it. However, grace goes further and gives to the undeserving.

Someone has said that justice is getting what I deserve; mercy is not getting what I deserve; and grace is getting what I don't deserve.

Transforming nature of grace:

It is this undeserved nature of God's grace that makes it so remarkable and effective in transforming human lives. Karl Barth made the comment that Jesus' gift of forgiveness, of grace, was to him more astonishing than Jesus' miracles. Miracles broke the physical rules of the universe; forgiveness broke the moral rules.

The grace of Christ can inspire us in such a transformative way as to change our awareness of ourselves, of our potential as human beings and as humankind, and our awareness of God's gracious purpose for us and through us for all creation.

The spiritual power demonstrated by Jesus, and the saints who have sought to imitate his cooperation with God, is the energy which continues to heal the world, to bring it into more and more wholeness. This grace is realized in those who offer themselves in gratitude, enlist in God's vision for humankind, and discover our proper place in creation as we serve. This is the grace that makes us into earth stewards for Christ's sake. This grace is the assistance given us when we choose to live in the grace of God, giving ourselves over to whatever goodness we are meant to create, to redeem, to sustain. This kind of grace comes with the breathtaking awareness that we are participating in the very life of God, and it's awesome good!

Grace begets and gives birth to grace. The grace of God, because it is of God, has the power and energy to transform lives. We see this in the story of Zacchaeus [Luke 19], Mary Magdalene [Luke 8], Saul/Paul, the woman who anoints Jesus' feet [Luke 7], and the man of Gerasene who was demon possessed [Mark 5]. At the same time, the unfortunate reality is that we have the ability to receive, yet, remain unchanged by God's grace, as seen in the parable of the unforgiving servant who is forgiven much, but does not extend the same grace to a fellow servant [Matthew 18].

The theme for this 4th day of camp is the flip side of day 3.

Day 3: "Freedom from Performance"

Day 4: "Freedom for Performance and Finding Meaning and Purpose in God"

The initial experience of grace is unconditional and undeserved love that receives, accepts, forgives, and sets free. The second experience of grace is transformational that leads to being grace to and for others. Gerhard Forde, American Lutheran Theologian, once said that there are two basic questions:

Question 1: "What do you have to do to be saved?" Answer: "Nothing."

Question 2: "Now that you know you have to do nothing, what are you going to do?"

The theme for this day deals with the second question, "what are you going to do?"

B. OBJECTIVES FOR THIS DAY OF THE STUDY

To help the campers:

- understand and mature into the transformational nature of grace
- move from "have to" love and care to "get to" love and care for
- move from fear of trying to freedom to try
- to step outside themselves and be other-focused

C. MORNING WATCH

Video of potter and pitcher

There was a potter who wanted to make the perfect pitcher for her milk to pour on her cereal for breakfast. She thought about how much milk she needed it to hold. She thought about the shape of her hand and how to design the pitcher so that it would perfectly fit her hand. She thought about the place in her refrigerator where she would store the pitcher and how it would need to fit in its place. She thought about what kind of clay she would need to use that would be right to store the milk. She thought about the glaze that would be right for milk. And she went about the task of making the pitcher. When it was finished, she poured milk into the pitcher and placed it into the refrigerator to be ready for the next morning's breakfast. When morning came, she poured her cereal into her bowl, and went to the refrigerator to retrieve her pitcher of milk. When she reached for the pitcher, the pitcher spoke to her.

Pitcher: Hold it. What are you doing?

Potter: [startled] What?

Pitcher: I asked, "what are you doing?"

Potter: I was getting milk for my cereal.

Pitcher: Sorry, the milk is mine.

Potter: What?

Pitcher: The milk is mine.

Potter: I heard you. But I don't understand.

Pitcher: What don't you understand? It's mine. It is in me. I have it. I have been holding it. It's mine.

Potter: Excuse me, I don't think you understand. I made you. I dreamed you. I designed you. I fashioned you. I placed the milk in you, so that you could pour it on my cereal.

Pitcher: But it's mine. And you can't have it.

Potter: Oh. Well, if that's the way you want it...

Pitcher: That's the way I want it.

Potter: Then you can keep the milk.

Pitcher: I will.

Potter: But, I think you need to know, that soon the milk will spoil. And it will be rancid. And you will stink. And so the potter pushed the pitcher into the back of the refrigerator. And closed the door. And the milk soon spoiled. And turned rancid. And the pitcher stunk. And the pitcher was very unhappy.

Questions for reflection:

1. How did you feel about the story? About the potter? About the pitcher?
2. Who is the potter?
3. Who is the pitcher?
4. How has God dreamed you? Designed you? Fashioned you? Gifted you?
5. How/when do you refuse to let God's grace/gifts flow through you?
6. Any idea why?
7. What happens to you when you refuse to let God's grace/gifts flow through you?
8. How do you stink?

9. Are you happy when that happens?
10. What does this story say to you?

D. SCRIPTURE STUDY

Context

This is the 4th day of Bible Study. For Jr. High and above - Rafting Day. For the others it is a regular day. What effect does this day have on the study? Some possibilities:

- Jr. High and above:
 - Bible Study is in the morning right after worship, campers may be energized in anticipation of rafting, attention and focus may be hard to get and keep
- younger than Jr. High:
 - home is closer than before
 - getting worn down by all the activity, lot's of energy through Wednesday, but this day the energy level is lower than the rest of the days
- campers have decided:
 - if the study is a safe place to be involved
 - if the study is going to be interesting, relevant, and worth their time
 - if you as leader know and believe what you are teaching
 - if you as leader have control of the study and the group
 - if you as leader care for and about them

SOOOOO...be ready, be prepared, be energized, be engaged. Make sure that you spend your own time in prayer (as short as that time may be) asking for the presence and guidance of the Holy Spirit.

Setting

THIS IS IMPORTANT. Gather campers into a **close** circle so that you can have good eye contact with each one of them and so that you can touch them on a foot or arm to bring them back into the study. Physically mirror the "intimacy" that you have been working on. Also, eliminate distractions.

Prayer

Rather than asking for a volunteer for opening prayer, ask one of the campers to pray for the whole group. If you ask a specific camper to pray at the beginning and end of each study you will be able to have everyone pray at least once during the week. If the camper asked says he/she doesn't know what to pray for, use that as an opportunity to teach how to pray.

Scripture

John 12:1-8 Mary anoints the feet of Jesus

Six days before the Passover, Jesus therefore came to Bethany, where Lazarus was, whom Jesus had raised from the dead. So they gave a dinner for him there. Martha served, and Lazarus was one of those reclining with him at table. Mary therefore took a pound of expensive ointment made from pure nard, and anointed the feet of Jesus and wiped his feet with her hair. The house was filled with the fragrance of the perfume. But Judas Iscariot, one of his disciples (he who was about to betray him), said, "Why was this ointment not sold for three hundred denarii and given to the poor?" He said this, not because he cared about the poor, but because he was a thief, and having charge of the moneybag he used to help himself to what was put into it. Jesus said, "Leave her alone, so that she may keep it for the day of my burial. For the poor you always have with you, but you do not always have me."

Matthew 18:23-35

"Therefore the kingdom of heaven may be compared to a king who wished to settle accounts with his servants. When he began to settle, one was brought to him who owed him ten thousand talents. And since he could not pay, his master ordered him to be sold, with his wife and children and all that he had, and payment to be made. So the servant fell on his knees, imploring him, 'Have patience with me, and I will pay you everything.' And out of pity for him, the master of that servant released him and forgave him the debt. But when that same servant went out, he found one of his fellow servants who owed him a hundred denarii, and seizing him, he began to choke him, saying, 'Pay what you owe.' So his fellow servant fell down and pleaded with him, 'Have patience with me, and I will pay you.' He refused and

went and put him in prison until he should pay the debt. When his fellow servants saw what had taken place, they were greatly distressed, and they went and reported to their master all that had taken place. Then his master summoned him and said to him, 'You wicked servant! I forgave you all that debt because you pleaded with me. And should not you have had mercy on your fellow servant, as I had mercy on you?' And in anger his master delivered him to the jailers, until he should pay all his debt. So also my heavenly Father will do to every one of you, if you do not forgive your brother from your heart."

Matthew 25:14-29

"For it will be like a man going on a journey, who called his servants and entrusted to them his property. To one he gave five talents, to another two, to another one, to each according to his ability. Then he went away. He who had received the five talents went at once and traded with them, and he made five talents more. So also he who had the two talents made two talents more. But he who had received the one talent went and dug in the ground and hid his master's money. Now after a long time the master of those servants came and settled accounts with them. And he who had received the five talents came forward, bringing five talents more, saying, 'Master, you delivered to me five talents; here I have made five talents more.' His master said to him, 'Well done, good and faithful servant. You have been faithful over a little; I will set you over much. Enter into the joy of your master.' And he also who had the two talents came forward, saying, 'Master, you delivered to me two talents; here I have made two talents more.' His master said to him, 'Well done, good and faithful servant. You have been faithful over a little; I will set you over much. Enter into the joy of your master.' He also who had received the one talent came forward, saying, 'Master, I knew you to be a hard man, reaping where you did not sow, and gathering where you scattered no seed, so I was afraid, and I went and hid your talent in the ground. Here you have what is yours.' But his master answered him, 'You wicked and slothful servant! You knew that I reap where I have not sown and gather where I scattered no seed? Then you ought to have invested my money with the bankers, and at my coming I should have received what was my own with interest. So take the talent from him and give it to him who has the ten talents. For to everyone who has will more be given, and he will have an abundance. But from the one who has not, even what he has will be taken away.

Luke 19:1-10

He entered Jericho and was passing through. And behold, there was a man named Zacchaeus. He was a chief tax collector and was rich. And he was seeking to see who Jesus was, but on account of the crowd he could not, because he was small in stature. So he ran on ahead and climbed up into a sycamore tree to see him, for he was about to pass that way. And when Jesus came to the place, he looked up and said to him, "Zacchaeus, hurry and come down, for I must stay at your house today." So he hurried and came down and received him joyfully. And when they saw it, they all grumbled, "He has gone in to be the guest of a man who is a sinner." And Zacchaeus stood and said to the Lord, "Behold, Lord, the half of my goods I give to the poor. And if I have defrauded anyone of anything, I restore it fourfold." And Jesus said to him, "Today salvation has come to this house, since he also is a son of Abraham. For the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost."

Study

OK, here is a question to help us get back to where we ended our study yesterday: "What do we have to do to deserve God's grace?" [Field answers] [Name] **what do you have to do to deserve God's grace?**

Exactly, the answer is "nothing". There is nothing that you or I have to do to deserve, or get God's grace.

Say the following slowly, perhaps each sentence directed to a different person going around the group. Look directly at them, maybe even touch their shoe, their shoulder, their arm as you speak.

- **You are fully and totally accepted by God - now, always, without condition, without deserving, without question.**
- **To be accepted in this way, means that you are cherished, and you are loved.**
- **Grace means that who you basically are is valued, honored, and respected by God.**

- Grace means that you don't have to earn or deserve such care; it is simply there for you - yours as an outright gift.
- The grace of God is given to you at God's initiative. It starts with God.
- Grace is an expression of God's love for you, of God's desire, of God's unconditional acceptance of you - an expression of the very nature of God's being.

That was yesterday. Now, a question to get us into today's study: "Now that you know you have to do nothing to receive God's grace, what are you going to do?"

Before you answer, let's do some reading about others who experienced God's grace.

Turn to Luke 19:1-10, the story of Zacchaeus. [Name] would you read for us?

What was it that led Zacchaeus to such a response? [seek answers]

Exactly. Zacchaeus, who was hated and left out because he collected taxes for Rome, was overwhelmed, and moved by Jesus' grace towards him. Jesus reached out to Zacchaeus, and fully and totally accepted him without condition, without deserving, without question. And it felt so good to Zacchaeus that he responded gracefully to others. Grace leads to grace.

Have you ever felt that way? [wait for any responses, share your experience]

OK, now turn to John 12:1. [Name] would you read for us?

Any idea of what's going on here? Who these people are? Why Mary anoints Jesus' feet? [seek answers]

This is a continuation of yesterday's story of Mary and Martha. Yesterday Jesus told Martha that it is OK for Mary to just be at rest at the feet of Jesus. But, in this passage that takes place a couple of weeks later and after Jesus raised her brother, Lazarus, from the dead, those two experiences of grace lead Mary to a response of grace herself. Grace leads to grace. She is so overwhelmed by being cherished, and loved by Jesus that she anoints his feet. It is a response of pure gratefulness. It is not a response of having to pay back Jesus, or of owing him for what he did.

Have you ever felt that way? Have you ever been overwhelmed by grace, what someone has done to or for you, that you respond in pure gratefulness. [wait for any responses, give another one of your experiences]

The beauty of grace is that it frees us up to be who we are. We don't have to perform to be accepted by God. But, the beauty of grace is also that grace leads to grace. Because God accepts us for who we are, we are free to accept others for who they are, and we can grace them like God graces us.

Sounds great doesn't it? But what gets in the way of our gracing others? [solicit conversation]

Isn't one of the things that get in the way fear?

- What if I don't get it right?
- What if I am rejected?
- What if people think I'm stupid?

It can be scary, but one of the important things of trying, is that when we don't let that grace out [like this Morning's Watch] we get spoiled. So,

- why are we afraid to try? [solicit conversation] [looking for "failure"]
- what does failure mean to you? [solicit conversation] [I'm no good. People won't like me or exclude me]

Turn to Matthew 25:14-29 Let's each read a verse [name] please start reading for us.

To help us understand this parable, listen to the story of the *Festival of Art* written by Matthew Pottebaum.
[read the story and share the pictures]

Thoughts about the story? [solicit conversation]

Fear so many times gets in the way of our trying. But what does the *Festival of Art* tell us about trying?

- what does the artist do? [lets the child know that it is OK to try - mistakes are not the issue]
- what does the artist tell us about God? [that it is OK to try - mistakes are not the issue, God is with us]

The grace of God allows, encourages, and gives you the freedom to try. And if you fail, remember that God's grace takes care of that.

I want each of you to think of a situation in which God's grace allows, encourages, and gives you the freedom to try. Who in your life needs to feel God's grace through you? Take a moment and come up with a name.

[take a moment]

Got a name? Share that with us. [with younger campers you can suggest this may be someone in their family. with older campers this will probably someone who has hurt them or gives them grief]

What does that look like to share God's grace with them. [solicit answers and help them come up with good answers]

I know its scary or a hard thing to do. But when you get ready to try, take your touchstone, hold it in your hand, squeeze it, and:

- let it remind you of God's grace for you,
- let it remind you that God is with you,
- let it give you the courage to try,
- let it give you the freedom to fail.

E. ADDITIONAL STUDY IDEAS

A scripture to help get the idea of "blessed to be a blessing" is Genesis 12:1-3 God's covenant with Abraham and Sarah

Now the LORD said to Abram, "Go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land that I will show you. And I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and him who dishonors you I will curse, and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed."

A scripture to help get at the idea of what happens when we refuse to let God's grace transform us is Matthew 18:23-35

"Therefore the kingdom of heaven may be compared to a king who wished to settle accounts with his servants. When he began to settle, one was brought to him who owed him ten thousand talents. And since he could not pay, his master ordered him to be sold, with his wife and children and all that he had, and payment to be made. So the servant fell on his knees, imploring him, 'Have patience with me, and I will pay you everything.' And out of pity for him, the master of that servant released him and forgave him the debt. But when that same servant went out, he found one of his fellow servants who owed him a hundred denarii, and seizing him, he began to choke him, saying, 'Pay what you owe.' So his fellow servant fell down and pleaded with him, 'Have patience with me, and I will pay you.' He refused and went and put him in prison until he should pay the debt. When his fellow servants saw what had taken place, they were greatly distressed, and they went and reported to their master all that had taken place. Then his master summoned him and said to him, 'You wicked servant! I forgave you all that debt because you pleaded with me. And should not you have had mercy on your fellow servant, as I had mercy on you?' And in anger his master delivered him to the jailers, until he should pay all his debt. So also my heavenly Father will do to every one of you, if you do not forgive your brother from your heart."

F. IDEAS TO INCORPORATE THEME THROUGHOUT THE DAY

The following songs could be used instead of the bell to call campers, or before worship, roundup, lunch on the mall, etc. google them if you haven't heard them before.

Love Changes Everything Andrew Lloyd Webber

Love, love changes everything
Hands and faces, earth and sky
Love, love changes everything
How you live and how you die
Love, love can make the summer fly
Or a night seem like a lifetime
Yes love, love changes everything
Now I tremble at your name
Nothing in the world will ever be the same
Love, love changes everything
Days are longer, words mean more
Love, love changes everything
Pain is deeper than before
Love will turn your world around
And that world will last forever
Yes love, love changes everything
Brings you glory, brings you shame
Nothing in the world will ever be the same
Off into the world we go
Planning futures, shaping years
Love (comes in) and suddenly all our wisdom disappears
Love makes fools of everyone
All the rules we made are broken
Yes love, love changes everyone
Live or perish in its flame
Love will never never let you be the same
Love will never never let you be the same

Amazing Grace Judy Collins

Amazing grace! How sweet the sound
That saved a wretch like me!
I once was lost, but now am found,
Was blind, but now can see.

'Twas grace that taught my heart to fear,
And grace my Fears relieved;
How precious did that grace appear
The hour I first believed!

Through many dangers, toils and snares,
I have already come;
'Tis grace hath brought me safe thus far,
And grace will lead me home.

And when we've been there ten thousand years,
Bright shining as the sun,
We'll have no less days to sing God's praise
Than when we first begun.

Perhaps Love Placido Domingo and John Denver

(Placido Domingo)
Perhaps love is like a resting place
A shelter from the storm
It exists to give you comfort
It is there to keep you warm
And in those times of trouble
When you are most alone
The memory of love will bring you home

(John Denver)
Perhaps love is like a window
Perhaps an open door
It invites you to come closer
It wants to show you more
And even if you lose yourself
And don't know what to do
The memory of love will see you through

(Placido Domingo)
Oh, Love to some is like a cloud
To some as strong as steel

(John Denver)
For some a way of living
For some a way to feel

(Placido Domingo)
And some say love is holding on
And some say letting go
And some say love is everything
And some say they don't know

(John starts joined by Placido)
Perhaps love is like the ocean
Full of conflict, full of pain
Like a fire when it's cold outside
Thunder when it rains
If I should live forever
And all my dreams come true
My memories of love will be of you

(Placido Domingo)
And some say love is holding on
And some say letting go

(John Denver)
And some say love is everything
Some say they don't know

(John starts joined by Placido)
Perhaps love is like the ocean
Full of conflict, full of pain
Like a fire when it's cold outside
Or thunder when it rains
If I should live forever

And all my dreams come true
My memories of love will be of you

The Rose

Some say love, it is a river
That drowns the tender reed.
Some say love, it is a razor
That leaves your soul to bleed.
Some say love, it is a hunger,
An endless aching need.
I say love, it is a flower,
And you its only seed.

It's the heart afraid of breaking
That never learns to dance.
It's the dream afraid of waking
That never takes the chance.
It's the one who won't be taken,
Who cannot seem to give,
And the soul afraid of dyin'
That never learns to live.

When the night has been too lonely
And the road has been too long,
And you think that love is only
For the lucky and the strong,
Just remember in the winter
Far beneath the bitter snows
Lies the seed that with the sun's love
In the spring becomes the rose.

For Confirmation Weeks the scripture or parables used in this study could be incorporated into the Life of Christ

G. OTHER SONGS, STORIES THOUGHTS, QUESTIONS, AND SUGGESTIONS

Camp songs: Pass It On, Thy Word, We Are the Family of God, I Love You, Fill My Cup, I'll Do My Best, Walk'in In the Light, They'll Know We Are Christians, Be Bold, Isaiah 43, Messiah, One Name, Step by Step, Love Round, I Am Free

H. IDEAS TO ADJUST STUDY DOWN FOR JUNIORS

It might be helpful to relate the grace of God to the grace/love of their parents. So the question, "what do you have to do to deserve, or get God's grace?" can be reframed, "what do you need to do to deserve, or get your parents' love?"

I. IDEAS TO ADJUST STUDY UP FOR SR HIGHS

Get them to talk more freely about their fear of trying

J. STAFF STUDY

Something for you to think about in this study. The campers are very perceptive. They will be watching you very closely and will decide pretty quickly whether you are authentic or not - whether you believe all this stuff about grace or not. They will watch to see:

- if you accept and live in God's freeing grace that allows you to be who you are and not try to be someone you are not

- if you live God's grace in accepting all the campers, equally, for who they are and not who you want them to be
- if and how you help them accept and live God's grace
- what your motivation is in relationship to others - to be accepted or to live freely

Their observation will not feel very grace filled. And it is not. But you can turn it into grace by choosing to live authentically in God's grace. You can gracefully let them in on your own struggle to lean and live in God's freeing, and empowering grace.

In many ways this week's study will be hard for you. You won't be able to fake it. But then, you don't have to.

K. PARENT DEVOTIONAL

Scripture: Luke 19:1-10

Reflection on the day's study from camp

One of the things that you have been teaching your child is that they are loved, and that your love for them is to be reflected in their love for others, especially those in your family. Unfortunately, there are a number of things working against you.

- the culture that proclaims that it is "all about me"
- the culture that continually teaches them that they have to be perfect to be loved and/or accepted
- their fear of having their love and care for others will be rejected
- their fear of failure

Today's study seeks to help them see God's grace as transformational. Because God loves us we can in turn dare to love others as God loves us. Today's specific goals for your child are to help him/her:

- understand and mature into the transformational nature of grace
- move from "have to" love and care for, to "get to" love and care for
- move from fear of trying to freedom to try
- to step outside themselves and be other-focused

A short activity for the family

Because we learn best through modeling it is important for you to display this in your family life, as difficult as that might be with all the demands of time and energy of contemporary life. So we encourage you to do the same. One specific way to accomplish that would be to daily [mealtime?] talk about:

- the ways you understand and feel the grace of God in your life
- how that encourages you to grace others
- the fears you have to do that
- and how God helps you overcome your fear to try

Closing Prayer

Pray with each other asking God to help you grace others as God has graced you.

2012 BIBLE STUDY – IT’S ALL ABOUT GRACE

Day 5

Grace in a Graceless World

A. INTRODUCTION TO THE THEME

This summer’s theme focuses on God’s gift of grace. Grace stands at the very heart of God’s nature. To know God, is to be touched by grace. God’s grace is a radical grace, and we often find ourselves surprised at how God’s grace touches us, or touches others. (Sometimes we find ourselves surprised at who God’s grace touches! Some of them are people we may not expect – or want! – to be recipients of grace...) God’s ways are often beyond our understanding. Grace is what welcomes us fully into God’s promise. We are freed from having to earn God’s love or favor. Even when (perhaps especially when?) we fail to live as God has called us to live, God’s grace embraces us. Grace is also what frees us to throw ourselves into faithfulness. We don’t have to worry about failing or coming up short. No matter the result of our efforts, God’s grace continues with us as a source of strength and hope.

Yet because of the brokenness of humanity, we know that life will not be a steady progression of growing more deeply into God’s grace. We live in a grace-less world. We live in the midst of others who do not treat us with grace. We ourselves fall to the temptation to be less than gracious with others. And so we discipline ourselves to lean into God’s grace. We look for those places, experiences and people that are sources of God’s grace for us. We regularly return to them, with open hearts, seeking to be touched by grace. We understand that only when we are regular recipients of God’s grace can we become regular vehicles of God’s grace. Only when our own hearts are filled with grace, do we have grace to share.

B. OBJECTIVES FOR THIS DAY OF THE STUDY

- Review the themes of the week: God’s very nature is grace; grace is surprising; grace frees us from having to perform (in order to win God’s favor); grace frees us to perform (in order to be a vehicle of grace for others).
- Consider the story of Simon Peter, the leader of the disciples, who continually falls from grace, but who time and time again is loved and welcomed and fully included by Jesus. His most profound experience takes place when he meets Jesus after the resurrection, on the shore of the Sea of Tiberias. For Peter, this is a tangible, concrete experience of God’s grace. And it changes his life for good.
- Discern where the sources of grace might be in our own lives.
- Acknowledge that experiencing grace happens on an ongoing basis; that one doesn’t remain “in a state of grace,” but as we are regularly wounded by ungracious people (and as we fail, ourselves, to be gracious with others) we have an ongoing need to experience and be refreshed by God’s grace.

C. MORNING WATCH

** For morning watch on this fifth day, we’ll peek in on a conversation that is taking place between two Rainbow Trail counselors at the end of the summer. They sit in a dorm room (in BC, perhaps?), surrounded by backpacks, suit cases, and piles of junk – ready to carry it all out and pack it into cars.*

Camp Counselor #1: Can you believe the summer is already over?

Camp Counselor; #2: I can’t. It seems like we just got here yesterday.

CC#1: For sure. Remember when we first got here? We didn’t know anybody. Now we know everybody so well. What a difference!

CC#2: I know. I really love these guys. I’m going to miss them so much.

CC#1: Me too. I am exhausted, though. I don’t think I’ve ever worked this hard in my entire life.

CC#2: Seriously! I can’t wait to get home and crawl into my bed. I think I’m going to sleep for a week.

CC#1: Yeah, I feel the same way. But do you know what? I have to tell you: I’ve never had a summer that has been this amazing!

CC#2: It was a lot of fun. And I can't believe you got to spend the last week in a village, working with Dan (Dani). He (She) is the cutest counselor in the whole camp!

CC#1: Well that's true, I suppose. But that's not what I meant. I didn't just mean that it was a fun summer.

CC#2: Really? What do you mean?

CC#1: I just have never felt so close to God before, in my whole life. I mean, I've gone to church all my life. We did Sunday School, and Vacation Bible School, and Youth Group and all that stuff. But most of the time I was just there because it was fun – kind of like you said.

CC#2: There's nothing wrong with that, right? It's O.K. to have fun together, isn't it?

CC#1: Of course. And this summer has been so much fun. But it's been different for me.

CC#2: It has? What was different?

CC#1: I don't know for sure, but there is something about this place. I've felt like God was so close to me all summer, and I've never felt that way before. My heart has been filled so many times. Staff training. The first week of camp when we finally got to work with campers. The worship services. The late night conversations in cabins. Sleeping out on the ball field. Seeing campers show up unhappy to be here, but really hooking in and getting something out of the week. The way this staff has pulled together and accomplished so much more than we ever could have accomplished on our own. It just seems so obvious that God is here. It seems like I've seen a miracle almost every day. And despite how tired I feel, I've never felt my heart this full. It has just been amazing.

CC#2: That's so cool. I'm really glad for you.

CC#1: There is just one problem, though.

CC#2: What's that.

CC#1: We have to go home tomorrow.

CC#2: I know. I can't wait to see my friends.

CC#1: Me too. But at the same time I'm kind of worried.

CC#2: About what?

CC#1: Well, I feel like I'm different now than I was last May. I feel like I know God better; like God has a different place in my life now. God has really blessed me this summer. It seems like I've been given a gift; a gift I don't want to keep for myself; a gift I want to learn to give away to others.

CC#2: Well that's cool. There's nothing wrong with that. You can do that. I've seen you do it so many times this summer already. Like that time when that boy threw up during Roundup. You were so cool with him. You really made him feel better.

CC#1: I know. I know. But I'm worried: how am I going to keep this feeling alive? What if I go home, and start hanging out with my same old friends, and doing the same old things, and this feeling goes away?

CC#2: This feeling?

CC#1: Yeah, this feeling that God is close. That God is touching my life. That God is real – and makes a real difference for me every day. I really feel that here at camp, but what if I go home and that feeling starts to fade away. What if things aren't the same back there as they are up here? What am I going to do?

The counselors look at each other as the scene freezes and fades into the background, and in the foreground the following words gradually become visible.

Day by day, as they spent much time together in the temple,
they broke bread at home and ate their food with glad and generous hearts,
praising God and having the goodwill of all the people.
And day by day the Lord added to their number those who were being saved.

[Acts 2:46-47]

Questions for reflection:

1. How has God's grace touched your heart this week?
2. What are some places, experiences and people back home that can help you continue to experience God's touch?
3. How will you make sure to stay close to them, so they can help you stay close to God?
4. How would your life be different if you, like the people of the early church (in the book of Acts) found time every day to draw near to God, and be reminded of the grace that has touched you in this place?

D. SCRIPTURE STUDY

Primary Scripture: St. John 21:1-19 [the post-resurrection rehabilitation of Peter]

Secondary Scriptures: St. Mark 9:2-8 [Peter foolishly offers to build three tents on the Mount of Transfiguration]; St. Matthew 14:28-33 [Peter takes his eyes off of Jesus while walking on water, and begins to sink]; St. Matthew 16:21-23 [Peter protests Jesus passion prediction, and Jesus rebukes him]; St. Matthew 26:36-46 [Peter falls asleep while Jesus is praying in the Garden of Gethsemane]; St. Matthew 26:69-75 [Peter denies Jesus three times on Good Friday]; St. John 13:1-11 [Peter protests when Jesus wants to wash his feet]; St. John 18:1-11 [Peter cuts off the slave's ear in Gethsemane]

Begin with prayer, thanking God for how grace has shaped this week. We have been welcomed to this camp. We have been embraced by new and old friends in our village. We have been encouraged and supported by our cabin mates. And most importantly, through worship and Bible study and the fellowship we share, God has reminded us of the grace that is ours – which accompanies us every day of our lives, whether we are aware of it or not. Pray for forgiveness when grace has not been experienced, and for gratitude when it has been.

Let's take a couple minutes to review where we've been this past week. Who can help us remember the four daily themes that have taken place? (*Have campers share what they remember from these four conversations. Where they are missing details or key concepts, help them fill these in. See above ["Introduction to the Theme"] for suggestions.*)

- Day One: Grace = God's Steadfast Love
- Day Two: Grace = God's Unexpected Surprise
- Day Three: Grace = God's Gift of Freedom from Performance
- Day Four: Grace = God's Gift of Freedom to Perform

Commend your campers for what they have been able to remember. Invite one or two of them to share an experience from this past week when they have experienced God's grace (either receiving it or giving it). Have they been inspired by God's love for them? Has someone been gracious to them in a surprising way? Has grace shaped the way they understand how God loves them? Have they had an opportunity to share grace with someone else?

We are blessed to have a gracious God; one who loves us no matter what; one who has gifted us in so many ways. If we lived with a constant awareness of this grace, our life would be completely different. But the reality is: once we leave this place, and head back to the neighborhoods where we live, we'll discover that it is easy to forget that God's grace is always with us. It is easy to be overwhelmed by the remarkably ungracious way that people treat us. (*think of mean students, uncaring teachers, rude neighbors, short tempered parents, irritating siblings...*) As a matter of fact, after a day or two of being treated ungraciously, we ourselves might begin to treat people ungraciously too!

That is part of what it means to be human. Human beings are not perfect, are they? Human beings lose their focus on God, and begin to go in different directions (directions that are not pleasing to God). No matter how profoundly a week at camp might touch us, or an experience of forgiveness, or the awareness that God is close in the Eucharist, or a "mountain-top experience of faith," we tend to drift away; to fall away; to lose sight of the grace of God in our lives. (If appropriate, you might want to invite your campers to share experiences they have had, when they've felt far away from God's grace.)

When that happens, we can take a small measure of comfort from the fact that we are not alone. Most people have experienced this falling away (contrary to their own intentions) – including a number of well-known people from the Bible.

One of those is a man named Simon Peter; the brother of Andrew; one of the first disciples Jesus called to be his follower; and the disciple who eventually became a "leader of leaders" among the first disciples. What do you know about Simon Peter? What can you tell us about him? (*Have campers answer; you might prompt them with suggestions like the ones that follow here.*)

- He is a fisherman by trade.
- He and his brother, Andrew, begin following Jesus at the same time.
- He is part of Jesus' inner circle of followers, along with Andrew, James and John.
- He eventually becomes a leader of the disciples.
(Jesus calls him "the rock on whom I will build my church." He, along with James and John, is described in the Book of Acts as one of the leaders in the early church. The Roman Catholic Church thinks of him as the leader of leaders who was located in Rome. They believe that the popes are his successors, as leaders of leaders, who are located in Rome.)
- He makes a lot of mistakes as a disciple – it seems that most of the time he just doesn't understand what Jesus is saying and doing.
- His worst failure takes place on Good Friday, when just as Jesus predicted (and despite his own protests), he denies Jesus publicly three times.

Let's talk about the last week of Jesus' life: about his suffering and death. What do you think that is like for the disciples? What do you imagine they are thinking and feeling? (*They are frightened. They are confused. They think Jesus is gone for good. They are disappointed because they thought he was going to be the new King who sets them free from the Romans. They are afraid that those who killed Jesus might soon come after them. Perhaps they wonder if they could have done something to prevent their leader's death...*)

It is a difficult and frightening time for all the disciples. But it is even tougher on Simon Peter. Think about what happens with him over the course of four days.

- Maundy Thursday
 - Jesus predicts that Peter will deny him three times. [St. Luke 22:31-34]
 - Peter falls asleep while Jesus prays in the Garden of Gethsemane, and Jesus has to scold him. [St. Mark 14:32-42]
 - Peter cuts off the ear of the High Priest's slave when they are arresting Jesus, and Jesus doesn't approve. [John 18:1-11]
- Good Friday
 - Peter denies that he even knows Jesus – three times! – in the courtyard of Pilate's palace. [St. Luke 22:54-62]
 - St. Luke tells us that at the moment of Peter's third denial, Jesus looks at him:
^{22:60}But Peter said, "Man, I do not know what you are talking about!" At that moment, while he was still speaking, the cock crowed. ⁶¹The Lord turned and looked at Peter. Then Peter remembered the word of the Lord, how he had said to him, "Before the cock crows today, you will deny me three times." ⁶²And he went out and wept bitterly. [St. Luke 22:60-62]
 - As Jesus dies, in all four Gospels, it appears that Peter is nowhere to be found.
- Holy Saturday
 - Peter goes into hiding with the rest of them. He is alone with (and haunted by) his memories of what has just taken place. He continues to replay the events of Holy Week over and over in his mind.

By Easter Sunday, Peter is devastated. He has let his Lord down at the most important time. The image of Jesus turning and looking at him in Pilate's courtyard is painfully burned into his memory. Peter is furious with himself. He is humiliated at his lack of courage and conviction. Most of all, he is devastated at the prospect that Jesus has gone to his death, deeply disappointed in Peter.

Each of the Gospel accounts tells the Easter story in its own unique way. One of St. Mark's endings suggests that Peter is with the disciples when Jesus "upbraids them" for not believing that he has been raised. [St. Mark 16:14] St. Luke suggests that Jesus meets with Peter. (*They were saying, "The Lord has risen indeed, and he has appeared to Simon!"*) [St. Luke 24:34] St. John reports that Peter runs to the tomb on Easter Sunday, and sees the linen wrappings, but doesn't understand [St. John 20:1-10], and then later that Jesus meets with the disciples, including Peter, (once without Thomas, and once with him) twice after the resurrection on Sunday evenings. [St. John 20:19-29] But it is St. John's third post-resurrection appearance that features Peter, and the moment when he receives the profound gift of God's grace from Jesus.

After Jesus' death and resurrection, the disciples wait for a while in Jerusalem. Eventually Peter gives up waiting and decides to go back to fishing. Six of the other disciples decide to go with him. Let's all open our Bibles to the 21st chapter of John, and see what it says. [Have someone read verses 1-3.]

^{21:1} After these things Jesus showed himself again to the disciples by the Sea of Tiberias; and he showed himself in this way. ² Gathered there together were Simon Peter, Thomas called the Twin, Nathanael of Cana in Galilee, the sons of Zebedee, and two others of his disciples. ³ Simon Peter said to them, "I am going fishing." They said to him, "We will go with you." They went out and got into the boat, but that night they caught nothing.

These professional fishermen fish all night, and have no success at all. When morning comes, they are exhausted and frustrated and probably ready to head for shore, and a good long nap. But then they notice someone on the beach. [Have someone read verses 4-14.]

^{21:4} Just after daybreak, Jesus stood on the beach; but the disciples did not know that it was Jesus. ⁵ Jesus said to them, "Children, you have no fish, have you?" They answered him, "No." ⁶ He said to them, "Cast the net to the right side of the boat, and you will find some." So they cast it, and now they were not able to haul it in because there were so many fish. ⁷ That disciple whom Jesus loved said to Peter, "It is the Lord!" When Simon Peter heard that it was the Lord, he put on some clothes, for he was naked, and jumped into the sea. ⁸ But the other disciples came in the boat, dragging the net full of fish, for they were not far from the land, only about a hundred yards off.

⁹ When they had gone ashore, they saw a charcoal fire there, with fish on it, and bread. ¹⁰ Jesus said to them, "Bring some of the fish that you have just caught." ¹¹ So Simon Peter went aboard and hauled the net ashore, full of large fish, a hundred fifty-three of them; and though there were so many, the net was not torn. ¹² Jesus said to them, "Come and have breakfast." Now none of the disciples dared to ask him, "Who are you?" because they knew it was the Lord. ¹³ Jesus came and took the bread and gave it to them, and did the same with the fish. ¹⁴ This was now the third time that Jesus appeared to the disciples after he was raised from the dead.

Who is it on the beach? (*Jesus*)

Why don't they recognize him? (*This seems to happen a number of times: at the tomb, on the way to Emmaus, here at the sea. Evidently his post-resurrection appearance was somehow different.*)

When do they finally recognize him? (*When they catch an amazing amount of fish. When their experience of life dramatically changes. When they are no longer ineffective at what they are trying to do.*)

What is the last thing St. John tells us about Peter and the others in this section? (*They don't dare ask him "Who are you?"*)

What do you suppose that means? (*That they were afraid of him? That they worried about how he would answer them? That they didn't dare believe their eyes?*)

Let's read the next few verses. Here's the heart of this story. [Have someone read verses 15-19.]

^{21:15} When they had finished breakfast, Jesus said to Simon Peter, "Simon son of John, do you love me more than these?" He said to him, "Yes, Lord; you know that I love you." Jesus said to him, "Feed my lambs." ¹⁶ A second time he said to him, "Simon son of John, do you love me?" He said to him, "Yes, Lord; you know that I love you." Jesus said to him, "Tend my sheep." ¹⁷ He said to him the third time, "Simon son of John, do you love me?" Peter felt hurt because he said to him the third time, "Do you love me?" And he said to him, "Lord, you know everything; you know that I love you." Jesus said to him, "Feed my sheep. ¹⁸ Very truly, I tell you, when you were younger, you used to fasten your own belt and to go wherever you wished. But when you grow old, you will stretch out your hands, and someone else will fasten a belt around you and take you where you do not wish to go." ¹⁹ (He said this to indicate the kind of death by which he would glorify God.) After this he said to him, "Follow me."

When Peter finds himself face-to-face with Jesus on the shore, what do you think Peter expects Jesus to do? (*Be angry with Peter for denying him three times. Deny Peter like Peter had denied Jesus. Inform Peter that because of his failure, someone else was going to be the leader of the disciples. Inform Peter that he was no longer welcome to be one of his disciples.*)

What does Jesus ask Peter? (*Three times, in three different ways, he asks him if he is willing to care for his followers.*)

What is the significance in asking three times? (*Peter denied Jesus three times on Good Friday. Now he has three opportunities to make up for that.*)

What is Jesus' final word to Peter in this passage? (*Follow me.*)

Why is that significant? (*Despite his “fall from grace,” Peter is still welcome to be a full participant in the band of Jesus’ disciples. Jesus responds with grace. Clearly it makes a phenomenal difference: Peter quickly becomes a courageous leader of the disciples. He seems fearless in his attempts to follow Jesus. He is faithful even to the point of death: legend has it that Peter is crucified because of his faith in Jesus.*)

So Peter disappoints his Lord in a profound way on Good Friday. He loses touch with God’s presence in his life. He begins to worry that the Roman soldiers are more powerful than God. He forgets, for a time, the amazing works he has seen Jesus perform. From the perspective of this week’s study, Peter has lost his ability to see the grace of God that has been so much a part of his life since meeting Jesus. He gives up waiting for Jesus, and goes back to his former occupation as a professional fisherman.

What happens next? Peter has another encounter with Jesus – and it is a profoundly gracious one. It affirms Jesus’ love for him, and reaffirms his call to be a leader of those who follow Jesus. He goes on to be one of the most important figures in the life of the early church. We can’t help but wonder how much of that becomes possible because of the grace he receives from Jesus after that seaside breakfast. Perhaps it even instills in him the belief that if he is going to be strong enough to be a leader of the disciples, he is going to have to be firmly rooted in the grace of God – he is going to have to lean into the grace of God – he is going to have to find ways to continually be reminded of the grace of God that goes with him wherever and whenever he is.

The same is true for us. If we are going to stay strong in our faith; if we are going to be people of grace; if we are going to be vehicles of grace through which God works to help others experience what we’ve experienced, we will need to find ways to be reminded of the grace of God that has touched us; the grace of God that continues to give us strength and hope. Let’s think a bit about that grace.

How have you experienced grace here at Rainbow Trail? (*In the love that counselors or other staff members have shown me. In the messages we’ve heard about God. In the caring relationships that I’ve formed with my cabin mates or members of my village. In our times of worship. The way God seemed very near on hike day.*)

How might you experience grace once you’re back home? (*By worshipping regularly. By reading my Bible. By hanging out with people who share my faith. By appreciating the “steadfast love” I receive from my parents. By the love of my youth minister or pastor.*)

If we want to be faithful to God – if we want the world to see that our faith makes a difference in our lives – we are going to need to stay grounded in grace, and let God fill us. Let’s think about what we’ve just identified – those places or experiences or people who help us to experience God’s grace. Let’s make a commitment to stay in touch with grace through these places and people.

Each of you has, in your pocket, a touchstone. It was given to you earlier this week. It has your initials stamped on it. Put your hand in your pocket right now, and feel that it is there. After a couple days of having it in your pocket now, that should be a familiar feeling.

I want to ask you, when you leave tomorrow, to make sure that it is always with you. Keep it in your pocket every day. I hope that whenever you reach into your pocket for a coin, or some keys, or whatever else you keep in your pockets, you will feel it there. And when you do, you will be reminded of the powerful grace of God that goes with you wherever you are. Even in those moments when you don’t remember it, God’s grace is with you. Especially in those moments when you really need it, God’s grace is with you.

Touchstones

Let these touchstones be a reminder of the grace of God that is with you, and let them also be a reminder to you of how important it is to continue to be touched by God’s grace. When you feel it there, remember to spend time at worship, or in prayer, or in reading the Bible, or in meditation. When you feel it there, take time to check in with your Christian friends. When you feel it there, remember how your parents or your youth minister or your pastor is a source of God’s grace for you.

Closing Prayer

Close with Prayer: Remember that time when Peter was completely discouraged, and how it was the grace of God that he experienced in Jesus, which turned him around. Pray that these campers will remember that God’s grace never leaves them. Pray that they will discover ways to lean in on God’s grace every day. Pray that they will never forget how profound

God's love is for them, and as their hearts are filled with grace, how they will become agents of grace for the people they know and love. Ask God's blessing on these final hours at camp, and on each of us as we make our way down the mountain, into what is often a grace-less world. Thanks be to God that even amidst this grace-less-ness, we are fortunate enough to be touched by God's grace.

E. ADDITIONAL STUDY IDEAS

Claiming the Baptismal Promise: Our baptismal promises can be a source of grace. Martin Luther famously struggled with doubts (not doubts about God's existence, but doubts as to whether God was for Luther or against him). Whenever these doubts would assail him, Luther would return to the promise of his baptism, believing that in those waters, God claimed him, and made him an heir of the promise that is everlasting. Consequently, whenever he felt tempted to give up on his faith, he would remember his baptism, be touched by God's grace, and be encouraged in faith. In fact, Luther believed that Satan often directly assailed him. Whenever that would happen, he would respond to Satan by saying: "I am baptized, Satan, and there isn't anything you can do about it!" Legend has it that he carved "Baptismus Sum" into his reading desk – Latin for "I am baptized."

For Luther, this was a source of strength because it was based on God's reputation for being one who keeps promises (not on Luther's ability to believe sufficiently). As long as he was depending on God, and not on himself, Luther could have confidence that his relationship with God was in good order. This is an experience of God's grace.

Is baptism a sign of grace for us today? We can be renewed in grace by remembering the promise of baptism. We can adopt the habit of remembering our baptism every time we see water (which, thankfully, covers 2/3 of the earth), or every time we step into the shower. We can begin every day by marking ourselves with the sign of the cross (a liturgical gesture that invites us to remember the promise of our baptism).

If your campers are old enough, and it is safe, perhaps you want to visit the creek with them. Have them reach down into the water, and dip their thumb in. Then, as they make the sign of the cross on their foreheads with their thumbs, have them repeat after you: "I am baptized... Satan... and there isn't anything you can do about it!"

Ask them to pay attention to where the baptismal font is in their home church. If it is near the door, encourage them to dip their thumb in the font, and mark themselves with the sign of the cross as they enter and exit the church. Remind them that this is a way we can recall God's grace for us in baptism.

Camper's Ideas / Camper's Experiences: Do the campers have any ideas about how we might open our hearts to the movement of God's grace? What has worked for them? When have they experienced God's grace? Is there anything they can do to increase the odds that it will happen for them again?

The Constancy of God's Grace: Our reliance on God's grace is always a re-membering, not a returning. We never are separated from God's grace (although there may be time when we lose sight of that). Grace is always there. God is always present with us. It is we who lose sight of it. Faith habits (or disciplines) of worship, prayer, study, and meditation can help us not to lose sight of the promise. We need to be re-membered – reconnected – re-established with God on a regular basis. It is God's grace that allows this to happen.

An Image for Returning to Grace: A specialist in childhood development once conducted a research project. It had to do with independence and connectedness in the lives of very young children. To conduct the research, observations were made at a local play area for toddlers. The actions of each individual child in the play area were mapped out, and they displayed a remarkable degree of consistency. Each child would wander throughout the playground, sometimes wandering to the far edge of the enclosure. But at consistent and eventually predictable intervals, each child would return to where Mom or Dad was seated on a park bench to say hello, or to get a hug, or to have a drink. Some children wandered farther and longer than others. And some children stayed near to Mom or Dad for a longer time than others. But each child had his or her own pattern of coming and going.

The researchers concluded that for these young children, playing in the park was an important but taxing experience. They could enjoy themselves for only so long, before they needed the touch of a parent to assure them and provide the confidence they needed to head back out into the fray. They needed to know that Mom or Dad was still there. And so their play time was shaped by this pattern of going out and enjoying the experience, then coming back to be reminded that a parent was close at hand, and then going out again.

Truth be known, most of us never really leave that pattern. What is true for the youngest members of our community is true for the older members of our community as well. In our coming and going, we can lose sight of the fact that God is always with us, and God's grace is always sustaining us. It becomes important for us to return to those places where we

experience grace, and are renewed. Some of us go for longer periods of time before returning to those places where we are renewed and invigorated. But we all return there periodically to receive what we need to continue.

F. IDEAS TO INCORPORATE THEME THROUGHOUT THE DAY

Staff Witness: At a worship service, include a staff witness in which someone focuses on how important it is to “lean into God’s grace.” Perhaps the contrast can be drawn between a time when worship, prayer, study and meditation weren’t a central part of life (and neither was an awareness of God’s grace), and a time when they were (and God’s grace seemed powerful and near).

Commitment to Seek Grace Back Home: Have the campers make a commitment to include in the rhythm of their lives the places, experiences and people that help them to experience God’s grace. Perhaps they could write a letter to themselves, to be opened at some future date, reminding them of their desire to let God’s grace be a regular part of life.

Encouraging One Another in Grace: Invite campers to contact one another during the coming year through e-mail, Facebook, a phone call or a letter, to encourage one another in seeking experiences of God’s grace. Perhaps cabin groups or villages could share contact information, and match up campers, so that everyone will be contacted by someone.

G. OTHER SONGS, STORIES THOUGHTS, QUESTIONS, AND SUGGESTIONS

*** Songs to Support the Day’s Theme**

Be Bold
Go
Pass It On
Seek Ye First

*** Questions:**

- Am I more likely to experience grace in a camp setting than “back home?” Does that have more to do with my surroundings or me?
- Are there places, experiences and people back home who can be a reminder to me that God is still near? Do I need to make some changes, so I can spend more time with them?

H. IDEAS TO ADJUST STUDY DOWN FOR JUNIORS * Ideas to try with Junior Age (4-6 grade)

- Invite the campers to agree on a definition for the phrase “God’s grace.”
- Ask campers to identify when they have experienced grace at camp this week. Then ask the following questions about that particular experience:
- Who made this a powerful or a sacred experience?
- Why do you think they did what they did?
- What does that tell you about them?
- Who do you know, back home, who is like that? Maybe you should plan to spend more time with people like that, and less time with people who seem more likely to tear others down.

I. IDEAS TO ADJUST STUDY UP FOR SR HIGHS * Ideas to try with Sr High (9-12 grade)

Often times we experience what we expect to experience. If we have concert tickets to our favorite musical group, we find ourselves filled with excitement and anticipation, the closer we get to the concert date. Sometimes we’re so excited about a show that even a mediocre performance can be inspiring. What would it be like to have that same level of anticipation in our faith lives? What would happen if we expected, every day, to have a profound experience of God’s grace? Would we be less likely to miss opportunities that come our way? Would we be more likely to be touched by grace?

The singer/song-writer Peter Mayer has a song he calls “Holy Now.” The lyrics [<http://petermayer.net/music>] include these lines:

When I was a boy, each week, on Sunday we would go to church
And pay attention to the priest; he would read the holy word
And consecrate the holy bread, and everyone would kneel and bow
Today the only difference is, everything is holy now.

When I was in Sunday school we would learn about the time
Moses split the sea in two; Jesus made the water wine
And I remember feeling sad, that miracles don't happen still
But now I can't keep track, 'cause everything's a miracle
Wine from water is not so small, but an even better magic trick
Is that anything is here at all
So the challenging thing becomes not to look for miracles
But finding where there isn't one

As a young boy in church, Mayer was limited by his narrower view of when and where miracles might take place. Now he sees the sacred in many instances that previously were hidden from him. How can a similar attitude of expectancy help us to see God's grace in instances where it might not previously have touched our hearts?

How does grace differ from kindness? Is there a specifically faithful, or Christ-like, aspect to the grace we are describing this week? When humans share grace, is it simply a kind, interpersonal gesture? Or can it also be an incarnation of God's grace? If we are going to commit ourselves to be recipients and agents of grace back home, is this an important distinction to make?

J. STAFF STUDY

As a staff member, you are both called to be an agent of grace through the summer months, as well as taking that same call down the mountain with you to be an agent of grace back home.

- A summer on RTLC staff is very demanding, with little down time. If we agree with the premise that we can only share what we have received from God in the first place, how will you carve out time to be touched by God's grace through these hectic weeks? What are the most effective / most efficient ways for you to do this? (What works for you may not work for someone else, and visa versa.)
- Life back home, whether at school or at work, can become hectic and fragmented with many involvements and responsibilities. If you plan to be an agent of grace over the long haul, it will be equally important to carve out time to be nourished by grace in that setting too. What is that going to look like for you? How can you make some commitments (to yourself and to God) for when that time comes?

As you are reading the Bible during your personal times of devotion this summer, keep a running log of which Biblical characters seemed filled and overflowing with God's grace, and which ones seem to have hearts that have gone cold. Can you identify why that might be the case for each of them? Do your assumptions help you better understand how your life might continue to be filled and overflowing with grace?

K. PARENT DEVOTIONAL

Scripture - St. John 21:1-19

Reflection on the day's study from camp

God's grace is a source of strength for our lives and for our faith. Yet because of the brokenness of humanity, we know that life will not be a steady progression of growing more deeply into God's grace. We live in a grace-less world. We live in the midst of others who do not treat us with grace. We ourselves fall to the temptation to be less than gracious with others. And so we discipline ourselves to lean into God's grace. We look for those places, experiences and people that are sources of God's grace for us. We regularly return to them, with open hearts, seeking to be touched by grace. We understand that only when we are regular recipients of God's grace can we become vehicles of God's grace. Only when our own hearts are filled with grace, do we have grace to share.

Simon Peter often misunderstood what Jesus was trying to do, and in the critical hours of Good Friday, he lost sight of the truth that God's grace in his life was a more powerful force than anything the Roman government could bring to bear. Yet even when Peter lost sight of grace, Jesus didn't give up on him. He loved him. He affirmed him. He restored him. He gave him a new beginning. Peter's renewed experience of God's grace in Jesus ultimately empowered him to be a bold and faithful leader in the early church.

Grace can have the same impact on our lives. As we return to those places, experiences, and people where we experience grace, our faith is renewed, our hope is strengthened, and we are grounded in the promise of the Gospel. We become both inspired and empowered to live as God's faithful people, in a way that allows others to glimpse the difference God is making in our lives.

A short activity for the family

As a family, make a list of those places and experiences where our hearts become beaten down and discouraged. Make a second list of those places and experiences where God's grace touches our lives and fills our hearts. Make a commitment, as a family, to seek out those enriching places and experiences on a regular basis.

Closing Prayer

Good and gracious God, we thank you for touching us, and filling our hearts. Help us to return to your grace time and time again, that our hearts might be filled to overflowing, and that we might find within ourselves the grace to share with others, so they too may come to know you. Help us remember that even in those times when we imagine we're alone, you are with us, seeking to comfort us and strengthen us for lives of faith. We pray this in the name of the One who loves us enough to die for us, Jesus Christ our Lord and Savior. Amen.